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THE PRIMACY OF PERCEPTION IN EPISTEMIC EVALUATION:
MERLEAU-PONTEAN REFLECTIONS ON EPISTEMIC RATIONALITY

THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE M.A. DEGREE IN PHILOSOPHY

THOMAZ CARLOS JACQUES

University of Ottawa

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The Primacy of Perception in Epistemic Evaluation;
Merleau-Pontean Reflections On Epistemic Rationality

Thomaz Carlos Jacques
051656

Thesis Abstract

The aim of my thesis is twofold. First, I wish to establish a necessary connection between knowledge and what phenomenologists have termed the life-world. It is a central tenet of existential phenomenology that knowledge claims, understood as objective, are grounded on a pre-predicative or pre-objective experience. But beyond vague descriptions of this relationship, the connection between these two domains remains unclear. My efforts will be directed towards an epistemological investigation of this relationship; i.e., I hope to show that the epistemic justification of objective empirical knowledge claims presupposes experience of the life-world. On the basis of this argument, I then wish to outline a theory of epistemic evaluation for phenomenological descriptions, and for empirical knowledge in general. This theory will stand as a positive alternative to contemporary theories of knowledge.

I approach these two tasks with the aid of the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. His writings represent, what I believe to be, the most successful attempt to deal with the two questions raised above. And his philosophy is interpreted within the context of these issues. The aim is not so much to provide an exegesis of Merleau-Ponty's thought, but rather to employ his philosophy as a kind of framework with which to deal with the two problems we have set for ourselves. Though in this process, a limited understanding of what Merleau-Ponty means by pre-objective experience and the primacy of perception will be attained.

The thesis begins with a general introduction to life-world phenomenology, and to the problems facing such a project. An argument is then provided for justifying the epistemological approach to these difficulties. It is

maintained that no phenomenology can ignore epistemology, and that any phenomenology which rejects Edmund Husserl's theory of eidetic intuition, must propose an alternative theory of epistemic evaluation, if it is to more than a description of personal experience.

This is followed by a discussion of two major competing theories of epistemic appraisal: foundationalism and coherentism. It is shown that both theories face serious problems, which are rooted, it is suggested, in their respective analyses of the experience which verifies empirical knowledge. To escape this impasse, the proposal is made to examine experience itself, independently of any theoretical preconceptions; an examination which holds out the possibility of revealing an alternative to the two opposing theories. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of a problem facing all epistemology, viz., that all investigations of knowledge appear to either presuppose instances of knowledge or the criterion of knowledge, thus undermining its traditional claims to being presuppositionless. If this is the case, our conception of epistemic rationality must be altered.

The next chapter presents Merleau-Ponty's critiques of sensationalism and intellectualism, which are parallel to foundationalism's and coherentism's conceptions of the evidence for empirical knowledge. Though, it becomes apparent that Merleau-Ponty's objections to intellectualism fail, for he does not fully consider the position. As a consequence, the intellectualist judgment theories of perception pose a problem for the notion of pre-objective experience. Since all experience is judgmental, and hence objective, we can have no access to a pre-objective experience. And the idea that it is the task of phenomenology to describe such an experience appears to be contradictory. A review of commentary on Merleau-Ponty's philosophy repeats these major criticisms, and others, and also reveals a profound inadequacy in the attempts to meet them.

The third chapter begins the process of answering the many questions

raised throughout the essay. An internal critique of empirical knowledge, as paradigmatically embodied in science, is developed, demonstrating that all objective empirical knowledge depends on pre-objective experience for its verification and its meaning. A further examination of this founding relationship discloses a connection of mutual dependence between the two spheres, with explicit judgment depending on pre-objective experience, which is itself a sediment of past judging activity. And this implicit predicative experience determines the meaning and justification of explicit judgments. This double edged relationship removes the apparent contradiction in a phenomenology of pre-objective experience. The chapter ends with a brief outline of Merleau-Ponty's own account of that experience.

The following chapter elucidates a theory of knowledge. It begins with a critique of Husserl's theory of intuition, arguing that the epochē, which is essential to eidetic intuition, is impossible, given our situatedness in the world. The theory that emerges from this, and from Merleau-Ponty's description of illusory and veridical perception, is a kind of epistemic contextualism, which is designated as a foundationalist-coherentism, as it adopts the positive features of both. Though calling this a "theory" of epistemic evaluation, it is so in an untraditional sense, for the theory is only an abstract description of our actual epistemic practice. The norm of epistemic evaluation is not a formal criterion, but pre-objective experience itself, a change in which can lead to a disconfirmation of all that we have said. Furthermore, the theory proposed avoids the worst forms of relativism, and indicates that all epistemic evaluation occurs within the context of an unevaluated, or presupposed and taken for granted, background of experience. —

This points to an answer to the problem of circularity in epistemology. In the concluding chapter, two responses to this difficulty are outlined, both of which prove to be inadequate. What is subsequently shown is that the circularity only proves to be such if epistemology purports to be presuppositionless.

Once the latter idea is abandoned, however, the problem dissolves. And what remains is a theory of knowledge which charts a course between sceptical nihilism and epistemic absolutism.

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Mortal thoughts befit mortal men.

Pindar, Isthmia

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Preface

Our present intellectual milieu echoes with the voices of disillusionment. Philosophers proclaim the overcoming of metaphysics, the end of epistemology, and the death of philosophy itself. Yet aside from the titillation that such declarations may provoke, they soon become tiresome by their very repetition. How often, in its history, has philosophy been interred, only to be born again in the dreams of another? But not to dishonour our new sceptics, one can recognize a change of spirit, if not of substance, in contemporary philosophy, which is no doubt symptomatic of a far deeper change in our culture. Edmund Husserl, painfully aware of the transformations overtaking western civilization and thought, uttered the epigraph of our age: the dream is over. Though Husserl never abandoned his rationalistic vision, it has been profoundly shaken since his passing. Philosophy was born of wonder, and in explaining and justifying reality, it hoped to satisfy that wonder. Its efforts have taken many forms, from seeking to know why there is something rather than nothing, to asking how it is that we know. This hope of discovering foundations, certainty, is now in doubt.

I, of course, cannot deal with the full scope of what is here in question. My task is far more limited. I do believe that the dream is over; that the search for absolute foundations is misguided. We are the inhabitants of Plato's cave, from which escape is not possible. At best, we may illuminate patches of its walls. But instead of this being a source of despair, we must come to see that this is the only truth open to us, that we may have knowledge of ourselves and our world, though it is not the certain knowledge promised to us in the past. Between the two worlds of light and darkness, lies the play of shadows which is our reality. It is through this domain

that I wish to chart our path.

My concern is with epistemology and the relationship to it of what may be termed life-world phenomenology. This relationship has never been clear. And claims about how the knowledge of the sciences is grounded in a pre-predicative or pre-objective experience are even more obscure. What I hope to demonstrate is that this grounding relation is necessary if we are to make any sense of objective knowledge claims. This will, in turn, open up a new conception of epistemic justification; one consistent with our experience. This is neither the overcoming of epistemology, nor the return to the dream. It is rather the rediscovery of Pindar's ancient wisdom, that the source of our knowledge is ignorance.

Introduction

The Search for Beginnings

The perceived world is the always presupposed foundation of all rationality, all value and all existence. This thesis does not destroy either rationality or the absolute. It only tries to bring them down to earth.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Primacy of Perception and Its Philosophical Consequences"

I

In the writings of Edmund Husserl, phenomenology is presented as a study of origins; the origins of the meaning of phenomena, the latter being understood to encompass all possible objects of consciousness. This can be seen as early as the Logical Investigations.

Phenomenology...lays bare the 'sources' from which the basic concepts and ideal laws of pure logic 'flow', and back to which they must once more be traced, so as to give them all the 'clearness and distinctness' needed for an understanding, and for an epistemological critique, of pure logic.¹

For Maurice Merleau-Ponty, heeding Husserl's call of going "Back to the 'things themselves'"² means returning to the world which precedes our knowledge, and which our knowledge is about.³ In the act of reflection, we reflect upon an unreflective experience, which Merleau-Ponty describes as the pre-objective perceptual contact of consciousness with the world.⁴ Pre-objective experience is antecedent to any conceptualization of, or theorizing about, reality. It is the ultimate ground for all cognitive activity, and is characterized metaphorically by Merleau-Ponty as the "cradle of all meanings"

and the "native abode of rationality"⁵ To return to this experience is not to disclose a reality of which we are ignorant. Rather, it is to make explicit, or bring to light, the pre-scientific life of consciousness, which alone gives meaning to scientific operations, and to which the latter always refer back⁶ The pre-objective world is the meaning fundament of the scientific world, the last being taken as the paradigmatic expression of an objective description of reality's universal properties. It is the basis upon which science is built⁷ and of which science is an abstract and second order expression.⁸ Objective thought, however, causes us to lose contact with this perceptual experience⁹ hence phenomenology, as a return to the things themselves, becomes an attempt to re-achieve our direct and primitive contact with the world!¹⁰ It aims at a direct description of experience, as it is!¹¹

[P]henomenological or existential philosophy assigns itself the task, not of explaining the world or of discovering its "conditions of possibility", but rather of formulating an experience of the world, a contact with the world which precedes all thought about the world.¹²

As descriptive, phenomenology is opposed to the explanatory objective sciences. In seeking to explain, science distorts the phenomena. Whereas if they are to be properly understood, they must be described and not constructed on the basis of presupposed theoretical demands!¹³ What must be kept in mind here is that Merleau-Ponty is not criticizing science as such. What he is challenging is an interpretation of science, which phenomenologists have termed "scientism". This is the conviction that knowledge of the world coincides with what can be expressed in the statements of the sciences, and that the knowledge which the sciences provide is the complete and only true description of reality!¹⁴ That Merleau-Ponty does not reject the sciences is evidenced in his claim that philosophy is itself impossible without the sciences' methodical exploration of phenomena. If philosophy were to ignore such studies, it would be reduced to a collection of formal truths!¹⁵ Phenomenology does not argue against the sciences' efforts to formulate objective descriptions, for all thought objectifies. Philosophy, which is for Merleau-Ponty phenomenology,

cannot itself escape this!⁶ But what phenomenology attempts to point out are the limits of that objectification. Ideally, there should be no rivalry between phenomenology and the sciences. Each can give support to the other, with the former studying the meaning origins of the phenomena discovered by the latter. As such, phenomenology grasps the bases and limits of objective descriptions of the world!⁷ Rather than accepting the identification of the real with the world as conceived by science, phenomenology places science on a more secure foundation, for it becomes truer to the things themselves, i.e., to pre-objective experience.

The return to pre-objective experience remains possible because objective thought does not so much suppress the experience, as sublimate it!⁸ In psycho-analysis, sublimation refers to an unconscious process by which a sexual impulse, or its energy, is deflected, so as to express itself in some socially acceptable activity, i.e., one manifestation of the impulse is substituted for another, with the impulse remaining active throughout the alteration. Analogously, objective thought is a cognitive substitute for the understanding that we have of reality in pre-objective experience. Nonetheless, this experience remains operative as the foundation of objective thought. "We never cease living in the world of perception, but we go beyond it in critical thought - almost to the point of forgetting the contribution of perception to our idea of truth!"⁹

This going beyond perception is essential to the progress of thought, which demands objectification and abstraction. It is the basis of science's success. As Aristotle already recognized, scientific "knowledge is judgement about things that are universal and necessary"²⁰ But the success of the sciences has also meant a departure from its origins, from that which gives meaning to its concepts, to the point of forgetting those origins for its own descriptions, taken in themselves. The regress called for by phenomenology is based on the unwarranted assumptions of science, arising from this forgetfulness. This internal tension between the conditions of the success of scientific

knowledge and the conditions of that knowledge's meaning, makes the philosopher a perpetual beginner,²¹ for he or she must constantly indicate the limits of objective thought. Philosophy, for Merleau-Ponty, becomes an act of remembering, in an effort to restrain the hubris of science. Like the attendant of the triumphant Roman commander, so too the phenomenologist whispers to the scientist, "Look behind you, remember that you are but a man". True philosophy consists in relearning to look at the world.²² Consequently, it does not present us with a body of knowledge, but is the constant vigilance of the sources of knowledge,²³ forever affirming the primacy of perception.

By these words, the "primacy of perception", we mean that the experience of perception is our presence at the moment when things, truths, values are constituted for us; that perception is a nascent logos; that it teaches us, outside all dogmatism, the true conditions of objectivity itself; that it summons us to the tasks of knowledge and actions. It is not a question of reducing human knowledge to sensation, but of assisting at the birth of this knowledge, to make it as sensible as the sensible, to recover the consciousness of rationality.²⁴

II

Merleau-Ponty's notion of pre-objective experience finds its historical antecedent and philosophical roots in Husserl's concept of pre-predicative experience, which characterizes what he terms the "life-world". It will be appropriate here to briefly outline Husserl's own position, so that we may come to a better understanding of Merleau-Ponty's philosophical project, and also to prepare the background for the problems that I wish to identify and deal with in this essay.

Like Merleau-Ponty, Husserl does not question the intrinsic value and validity of science. It is the interpretation of science, as to its ultimate meaning, that is at issue. "What is in question is the meaning of the sciences in a philosophical sense and, no less important, their human significance"²⁵ As conceived within the world of science, the subject qua theoretician and the world qua the law governed interrelationship of theoretical entities,

are abstractions. And if we take it as the sole truth, we emasculate our rich world of experience. The mathematically articulated world of scientific laws is a world of ideal relations and entities; things which are idealizations of a more concrete material. Science, as a kind of theoretical superstructure, requires a foundation upon which to rest.²⁶ The foundation is the pre-predicative experience of the life-world; an experience not yet articulated in explicit judgments and which gives us access to a world populated by individual entities with colours, sounds, textures, smells, and tastes. It is a world permeated by our affective states, evaluations, and practical activities. Simply put, it is "that province of reality which the wide-awake and normal adult simply takes for granted in the attitude of common sense."²⁷

With the development of science, however, the mathematically constructed world of ideal laws and theoretical entities comes to replace the world as it is given in experience, as the only true description of our world, and thus as the characterization of the real world.²⁸ But as with Merleau-Ponty, the life-world is not eliminated with the development of science, for it is the foundation of all scientific knowledge. The relationship between the life-world and the scientific world is described by Husserl in many ways. He claims, as does Merleau-Ponty, that it is the meaning fundament of all scientific idealities.²⁹ It is the source of meaning for all scientific statements.³⁰

In addition, Husserl states that the life-world is the source of ultimate evidence for scientific knowledge. This is variously characterized by Husserl. He says that the validity of theoretical truths is grounded on the prelogical validities of the life-world,³¹ that the life-world is a realm of self-evident givens,³² to which all epistemic verification leads back.

All conceivable verification leads back to these modes of self-evidence because the "thing itself" (in the particular mode) lies in these intuitions themselves as that which is actually, intersubjectively experienceable and verifiable and is not a substraction of thought; whereas such a substraction, insofar as it makes a claim to truth, can have actual truth only by being related back to such self-evidences.³³

The justification of knowledge claims cannot be found in the judgments themselves that are asserted. One must return to the mode of givenness of the objects about which judgments are made, and which are the conditions of the possibility for making judgments³⁴ All predicative knowledge is evidentially grounded in the self-evidence of pre-predicative experience³⁵

The primacy of the life-world for Husserl, or of pre-objective experience for Merleau-Ponty, is therefore twofold. It is the source of meaning for all objective knowledge claims, and equally the source of evidence for such knowledge. These two theses, of course, are not completely independent, as a theory of meaning underlies any theory of epistemic justification, and how knowledge is justified has implications for a theory of meaning. In either case, for both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, the "world of everyday life is...man's fundamental and paramount reality"³⁶

III

The preceding accounts of Merleau-Ponty's and Husserl's philosophies are of a preliminary nature. Yet they serve to set the stage for a discussion of some of the difficulties that confront this general philosophical vision. As was already noted by Husserl, the relationship between the life-world and the scientific-mathematical world is anything but clear.

The paradoxical interrelationships of the "objectively true world" and the "life-world" make enigmatic the manner of being of both. Thus [the idea of a] true world in any sense, and within it our own being, becomes an enigma in respect to the sense of this being.³⁷

Within the work of Merleau-Ponty, the connection between the two worlds is equally ill defined. What exactly does it mean to speak of a pre-objective experience? It has been argued that all experience involves concepts, or is theory laden. If so, can one make sense of an experience, which as pre-objective, is devoid of conceptual formation, or theory neutral? How is it that pre-objective experience can found objective knowledge? Pre-objective experience appears

to be radically subjective. It thus follows that the ultimate evidence for the verification of knowledge is subject relative. Yet science, and knowledge in general, as traditionally understood in philosophy, is claimed to be inherently objective. How can objective knowledge have a subjective justification? Is not knowledge then reduced to community consensus, or worse, individual idiosyncrasy? What is the epistemic status of descriptions of the world of pre-objective experience? Can such descriptions even be epistemically evaluated, given that what they are describing and attempting to capture as it is "lived", is a pre-objective experience, whereas truth claims have been conceived as objective? And if they cannot be epistemically evaluated, then pre-objective experience must be viewed as essentially non-cognitive, which threatens to remove it beyond our grasp, and raises serious questions about how a non-cognitive experience can serve as the evidence for knowledge. But if such experience can be described cognitively, in what sense of "cognitive"? Ultimately, what is the relationship between pre-objective experience and truth? The questions are potentially endless. But it will not be my task to deal with all the enigmas surrounding the relationship between pre-objective experience and the scientific world, nor to approach these in all the many ways that one can. Rather, as my questions suggest, I propose to examine how pre-objective experience can serve as evidence for objective knowledge. That is, my aim is to pursue an epistemological study of the relationship between these two domains.

IV

My intention to enter upon an epistemological investigation of the relationship between the life-world and the world of objective knowledge may perhaps be objected to by some phenomenologists. Phenomenology, as we saw, purports to be a descriptive enterprise, whereas epistemology is viewed as prescriptive.

It explains how knowledge claims are to be properly appraised, if indeed they can be. It is a normative discipline, and not descriptive. In addition, however, to a lack of clarity about how these two endeavours are to be properly distinguished, i.e., description and prescription, this objection sets up a fact/value distinction that is, as we will have occasion to see, untenable. But the objection is nevertheless a strong one, for even though phenomenological description may not be opposed to epistemology, it has been argued that phenomenology shows the problem of knowledge to be a pseudo-problem. And if this is the case, then the aim of this essay is superfluous and misguided. But I do not believe that this is so, the reasons for which I will try to show.

We may begin with Husserl's phenomenology. Husserl was not without concern for epistemological problems. Indeed, one recent commentary on his thought states that "epistemic appraisal is at the heart of his doctrine"³⁸ He himself characterized phenomenology as a neo-Cartesianism,³⁹ with all that this designation implies about a search for the evident foundations of knowledge. And in the Logical Investigations, he holds that epistemology precedes all other disciplines.⁴⁰ He claims to have been motivated to pursue his investigations by a dissatisfaction with psychologistic accounts of the foundation of logic, which led to a reflection "on the relationship...between the subjectivity of knowing and the objectivity of the content known"⁴¹ In other words, Husserl was led to consider how it is that subjective acts of consciousness can attain objective knowledge. And this is precisely the central problematic of epistemology. Given the apparent gap that may exist between what we claim to know, and how the objects of our knowledge may in fact be, the question arises of how we may be assured of the correctness of what we believe, which is the issue of how our knowledge is to be justified. If reality were immediately and unproblematically accessible to us, then the concept of epistemic justification would be superfluous. But that, unfortunately,

is not our situation?⁴² Consequently, for a belief to be accorded the status of knowledge, it must be justified.

By raising this question, Husserl places himself directly within traditional epistemology. And in the work, The Idea of Phenomenology, the possibility of cognition becomes the central theme.

Cognition in all of its manifestations is a psychic act; it is the cognition of a cognizing subject. The objects cognized stand over and against the cognition. But how can we be certain of the correspondence between cognition and the object cognized? How can knowledge transcend itself and reach its object reliably?⁴³

The study of cognition is "the first and principle part of phenomenology as a whole"⁴⁴ and for Husserl, phenomenology, as a method, holds out the possibility of solving its major difficulties.

We saw that phenomenology is characterized by a search for the origin of the meaning of phenomena; by a return to the things themselves. This, however, is an incomplete portrayal of this philosophy. According to Husserl, phenomenology is equally the search for the essences of meaning. And, in his concern with epistemology, he is seeking to reveal the essence of cognition.⁴⁵

Within natural thinking or the natural attitude, which conceives the subject as something which stands opposed to the objective world, the possibility of cognition is taken for granted.⁴⁶ But equally, that very possibility is rendered inexplicable given the unbridgeable gulf that is posited between the subject, and the world which the subject claims to have knowledge of. If one is therefore to investigate the meaning of the phenomenon of knowledge, a method is required which somehow removes from consideration the ontological status of the subject and the object of knowledge, because the natural attitude makes such an investigation impossible from the start. The method that Husserl proposes is the epochē, which involves the suspension or bracketing of our existential beliefs, and the subsequent reduction of what appears to consciousness to its pure meaning.⁴⁷ There is thus disclosed a sphere of absolutely immanent data.⁴⁸

There are two senses of transcendence and immanence, for Husserl, which must be kept in mind. He speaks of genuine transcendence and genuine immanence, in which an object is either not contained in a cognitive act of consciousness, or it is so contained, respectively.⁴⁹ This is contrasted with transcendence and immanence as such. The former refers to that which is given non-evidentially, whereas the latter indicates that which is given absolutely, i.e., an immediate seeing and apprehending of an intended object itself, as it is, ruling out any possibility of doubt. The sphere of immanence is thus the realm of self-evidently or intuitively given phenomena.⁵⁰

With the epochē, the immanent phenomena that are disclosed are immanent in the second sense. That is, having suspended our epistemic commitments to beliefs about the existence of what appears to consciousness, we are left with a multitude of meaningful phenomena, aspects of which are given with absolute self-evidence. (This distinction, within phenomena, between what is given self-evidently and what is not, i.e., between what is genuinely immanent and what is immanent, requires an eidetic reduction to be discerned, which Husserl does not develop in the The Idea of Phenomenology). And as so given, their meaning is universal, and hence genuinely transcendent. It follows that by means of the epochē, we arrive at self-evident givens which go beyond individual acts of consciousness. In other words, there is immediately given, objective knowledge, though it is limited to the knowledge of essences. The problem of knowledge is accordingly solved by having gone "beneath" the subject-object relationship as it is viewed within the natural attitude, to the origins of the meaning of the phenomena. In doing so, we come to recognize that we do have access to objective phenomena of which we may be certain as to their meaning. And, for Husserl, the self-evident essences of phenomena serve as the basic norms for the evaluation of all cognitions.⁵¹

In Kantian language, one may say that what Husserl has done is outline

the conditions for the possibility of objectivity. But this would be to mask a crucial difference between the two thinkers. Contrary to Kant, Husserl does not assume objective knowledge as a given and then deduce its conditions. To do so is to be uncritical, for one thus continues to philosophize within the natural attitude, which Husserl charged Kant with doing. A radical philosophy must bracket the natural attitude, and see how the meaning of objectivity, and thereby cognition, is experienced at the most basic levels of consciousness (which for Husserl ultimately leads back to the absolute being of transcendental subjectivity). Here, the problem of knowledge, as the problem of how consciousness acquires knowledge of transcendent entities, dissolves, for it is a philosophical problem that arises within the context of the natural attitude.⁵² For phenomenology, "the whole problem is inconsistent"⁵³ Hence Husserl has in a sense "overcome" the traditional problem of knowledge, in that his chief preoccupation is not to "explain" how consciousness attains objective knowledge, but instead to describe the meaning of objectivity. "The point is not to secure objectivity but to understand it"⁵⁴ In place of an explicit theory of knowledge, Husserl's phenomenology is a study of the meaning of the concept of knowledge, and its essential structures.⁵⁵ "It endeavours to raise to clearness the pure forms and laws of knowledge by tracing knowledge back to an adequate fulfillment in intuition"⁵⁶

It is these latter claims which have prompted the contention that phenomenology is not directly involved in epistemological issues. Indeed, the basic problem of traditional epistemology is seen to be the result of a philosophical confusion. Husserl appears to give support to this by affirming that realism and idealism, which may be viewed as two alternative answers to the problem of knowledge, are absurd.⁵⁷ And Merleau-Ponty follows Husserl in this regard.

In the last analysis, phenomenology is neither a materialism nor a philosophy of mind. Its proper work is to unveil the pre-theoretical layer on which both of these idealizations find their relative justification and are gone beyond.⁵⁸

And a similar position is put forward by Martin Heidegger. For Heidegger,

the problem of knowledge is able to get off the ground only if one sees the subject as caught in his or her own inner conscious presentations, with the subsequent difficulty that knowledge is somehow supposed to refer to an external world.⁵⁹ What this fails to consider is the being of the knowing subject.⁶⁰ The philosophical examination of knowledge, confined to the conceptual framework of an opposition between subject and object, is blind to what is always implied in knowledge. "[N]amely, that knowing is a mode of Being of Dasein as-Being-in-the-world, and is founded ontically upon this state of Being"⁶¹ Stated differently, a phenomenological investigation of the knowing subject reveals that underlying the subject-object relationship is an essential structure of subjectivity which ontologically connects the subject's being or Dasein to that of the world. The problem of how we can come to know the world therefore does not arise because we are always in the world.

But does phenomenology succeed in overcoming epistemology? Are all questions of epistemic evaluation set aside as redundant? Heidegger's comments seem to suggest as much. Though he does not reject traditional accounts of knowledge, their correctness is confined to the ontic level (the level of Husserl's natural attitude), as they leave out, or worse, conceal, the ontological understanding of truth as the disclosure or uncovering of Being.⁶² Phenomenology, according to Heidegger, must be a study which reveals the ground of the ontic, and what one thus arrives at is the disclosure of Being in the openness of Dasein. Thinking is not to be evaluated by a norm, but must rather let itself be claimed by Being, so that it can say the truth of Being.⁶³

Leaving aside the difficulties about what exactly Heidegger means by such statements, the question remains that unless we have some immediate contact with Being, then how is it that we can know that we are speaking the truth of Being, that we are properly attending to the call of Being?

This, of course, is to raise the traditional question of epistemology, and Heidegger appears to provide us with no answer.

Yet is not Husserl in the same position? I believe not. Recall that for Husserl, the task of phenomenology is to trace knowledge back to its adequate fulfillment in intuition; an intuition that is the basic norm for all cognition. Husserlian phenomenology is a foundational investigation for any real theory of knowledge,⁶⁴ for it clarifies the meaning of the concepts involved in such a theory, and thus provides the norms by which knowledge claims may be evaluated. Phenomenology is a rigorous science of phenomena, seeking to ground the meaning of all objective meaning in the self-evident givens disclosed in the immanent domain of consciousness. By means of the epochē, phenomenology aims to be an eidetic, a priori science, revealing the essential structures of phenomena, as constituted within transcendental subjectivity. "[E]idetic phenomenology explores the all-embracing laws that prescribe for every factual statement about something transcendental the possible sense (as opposed to the absurdity or inconsistency) of that statement"⁶⁵

The intuitive self-evidence with which these structures are given is the standard for phenomenological descriptions⁶⁶ and the principle of all principles for Husserl's phenomenology.

[P]rimordial dator intuition is a source of authority for knowledge... [W]hatever presents itself in "intuition" in primordial form (as it were in its bodily reality), is simply to be accepted as it gives itself out to be, though only within the limits in which it then presents itself.⁶⁷

Self-evidence, for Husserl, is not a feeling which accompanies an act of consciousness. It is a structural possibility of the intentionality of consciousness, in which an object which consciousness intends fully conforms with the manner in which it was originally intended⁶⁸

[T]he epistemologically pregnant sense of self-evidence is exclusively concerned with this last unsurpassable goal, the act of this most perfect synthesis of fulfilment, which gives to an intention, e.g., the intention of judgment, the absolute fullness of content, the fullness

of the object itself. The object is not merely meant, but in the strictest sense given, and given as it is meant, and made one with our meaning-reference.⁶⁹

The distinction between fulfilled and empty intentions of consciousness (both these states having, in turn, differences of degree) is the basis of Husserl's theory of evidence. And something is given with apodictic evidence when it is given in its entirety, as it is, i.e., all transcendent aspects of phenomena are excluded (by means of the epochē) in a complete grasp of the given object, as it is meant. It is in virtue of this intuition of essences that phenomenological descriptions take on a scientific character.⁷⁰ Having grasped the essences of phenomena, phenomenology provides an absolute foundation for knowledge. Not, however, in the sense of giving us a set of premises from which knowledge could be deduced, but by providing norms against which knowledge claims can be clarified and evaluated.

One may grant that Husserl's phenomenology does not directly confront the traditional problem of knowledge, but he does not thereby ignore epistemology. On the contrary, it remains central to his thought, insofar as the study of the essences of meaning must itself be epistemically justified, and insofar as these essences serve as the norms for evaluating non-essential knowledge. By failing to provide a deeper account of epistemic evaluation, Heidegger, for example, raises serious difficulties for his own phenomenological descriptions. He follows Husserl in questioning the traditional problem of knowledge, but has nothing clear to offer in its place by means of which his own descriptions could be justified. This applies to any phenomenology which asserts that it has overcome epistemology. Without Husserl's theory of evidence, the epistemic status of phenomenological descriptions comes into question. The failure to provide for an alternative theory warrants one in dismissing phenomenology as a perhaps interesting, but nonetheless personal account of human experience. As one author has put it, phenomenology becomes an "impressionism"⁷¹ describing "fortuitous snatches of reality"⁷²

The same holds for Merleau-Ponty. He explicitly rejects Husserl's theory of evidence, because it implies an absolute knowledge, which is, for him, in principle unattainable. But then Merleau-Ponty, if his phenomenology is to stand, requires a theory of epistemic justification.

Does this interest in epistemology, however, not thereby violate the descriptive nature of phenomenology? To answer in the affirmative is, as one writer has indicated, to misunderstand the nature of epistemic evaluation.⁷³ The latter is not an activity confined to philosophers. It occurs in our own everyday experience. And if a phenomenology is to faithfully describe that experience, it must also consider epistemic appraisal, by describing the operative norms of that appraisal.

v

Two problems emerge from our introductory discussion. First, what is the relationship between pre-objective experience and objective knowledge? More specifically, how is objective knowledge grounded in this, as yet to be determined, kind of experience? By answering this question, I believe we will be in a position to work out a theory of epistemic justification for a non-Husserlian phenomenology. In dealing with these two difficulties, we will also come to a limited understanding of Merleau-Ponty's concept of pre-objectivity. However, my foremost concern is not with Merleau-Ponty's philosophy as such. I wish rather to use his thought as a kind of framework to deal with a set of perplexities in what came to be known as existential phenomenology. My choice to work with the writings of Merleau-Ponty is based on the belief that he came the closest to answering our two problems. I also believe that there are serious difficulties with Husserl's phenomenology, which we will come to see. And I have already noted my dissatisfaction with Heidegger's thought. But, in addition, and more importantly, my aim

is not only to solve some difficulties that exist within phenomenology. In articulating a theory of knowledge for phenomenology, I believe that what is outlined can stand as a general theory of epistemic justification, and that it provides a strong alternative to the major competing theories in contemporary debates. And it is with this last issue that we will commence the essay.

VI

Before beginning, however, I would like to briefly note some limits to my discussion. My evaluation of the commentary on Merleau-Ponty, which deals with the problems that we have raised, is confined to English language texts. I am aware of the limits that this imposes upon my research and my own claims, and I can only say that I recognize this, and indicate to the reader that he or she be aware of this fact. Also, my examination and use of Merleau-Ponty is almost entirely confined to the Phenomenology of Perception. I do appeal to other texts, but only when they help to clarify something in the general discussion. I have completely excluded from consideration The Visible and the Invisible, for I did not wish to raise all the exegetical issues which surround this work.

Furthermore, though I concentrate upon epistemological matters in trying to elucidate the relationship between the life-world and objective knowledge, I do not maintain that this is the only way to approach this question. I have chosen this path because it is the area of philosophy in which I have the most interest, and because I believe that it is fruitful in providing a strong case for the necessity of this relationship. My criticism of competing theories of epistemic justification is also limited, in that it challenges only two positions. I do not consider a third major theory, viz., externalism, solely for reasons of space. Though I do believe that a criticism of this

view can be developed on the basis of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. Finally, my attention is directed solely to the justification of empirical knowledge. I do not treat a priori knowledge. Let us then plunge into the inferno of philosophical disputation, with Merleau-Ponty as our guiding Virgil.

Chapter One

The Joust of Criteria

How will you look for it, Socrates, when you do not know at all what it is? How will you aim to search for something you do not know at all? If you should meet with it, how will you know that this is the thing that you did not know?

Plato, Meno

I

The motivation for the discussion of epistemic evaluation arises from the fact that we do not have an immediate access to reality, and therefore our beliefs about the world may be mistaken. It is the purpose of an account of epistemic justification to indicate something that we do have access to, which can serve as evidence for the truth of what we believe. "The basic role of justification is that of a means to truth, a more directly attainable mediating link between our subjective starting point and our objective goal"¹ And what is identified as the mediating link determines the criterion of epistemic evaluation.

II

The first candidate for a theory of justification is based on a simple observation, viz., that the justificatory support that one belief gives to another can be transferred indefinitely from belief to belief. At what point then, in the chain of justifying beliefs, is the original justification provided?² A belief can be justified by another belief, but if the justification

given is to provide any degree of certainty, then the justifying belief must also be justified. The evidential support for the original belief is only as strong as the justification for the belief serving as evidence. This leads to a potential infinite regress of justification, unless one postulates a class of beliefs which are not justified by an appeal to further beliefs. The justification of these beliefs would be intrinsic to them, and thus they could function as the ultimate source of justification for all other beliefs. They would be the evidential foundation of a belief system. And without such a foundation, knowledge becomes impossible. This is the central argument for a foundationalist criterion of epistemic evaluation. It can be found in the writings of Descartes³ and has remained more or less unchanged up to the time of its modern protagonists⁴

My concern here is with empirical foundationalism, and the question of interest is the nature of these foundational empirical beliefs, which have been variously referred to as basic beliefs or propositions, protocol propositions, and propositions expressing a self-presenting property or state. Central to this doctrine is that these basic beliefs are not justified by an appeal to further beliefs, but by a cognitive state of "immediate experience" or "direct apprehension"; states which can provide epistemic justification without themselves requiring it⁵ What is immediately given in such experience terminates the regress of justification, as the beliefs about such experiences are verified by the experiences. The objective state of affairs to which a proposition or sentence corresponds (foundationalism has been traditionally associated with correspondence theories of truth) must be experienced in a certain manner, so as to justify the proposition, which itself undergoes an analysis into its simpler components, so that it may coincide with the direct experiences through which we gain access to the state of affairs. The intention here is to reduce the gap between the judgments of a cognitive agent and the experiences they are about, to

the point that a judgment does not go beyond the experience it expresses, i.e., the judgment and the experience have the same content. Moritz Schlick compared such judgments with analytic propositions, for in both cases, "the process of understanding is at the same time the process of verification"⁶ Though contrary to analytic propositions, basic beliefs inform us about reality, and hence can found other beliefs. A look at how these beliefs have been understood will help to clarify their nature.

Bertrand Russell gave two criteria for basic propositions: they must be caused by some sensible occurrence which is the evidence for the proposition, and no basic proposition can contradict another because the experience which one describes is independent of all other experiences⁷ These propositions are not to be identified with the perceptual judgments of common sense, such as, for example, "There is a dog". Such judgments surpass any immediately perceived datum, and consequently, they can be refuted by subsequent experience⁸ On the basis of basic propositions, one can know nothing about non-presently given experiences, experiences of other persons, or of entities described impersonally⁹ Our everyday statements must therefore be analysed into their basic component simple statements, such that the latter's meaning does not depend on these other experiences. A basic proposition is, in other words, an atomic proposition, in the sense that the meaning it expresses is logically self-sufficient!¹⁰ The statement, "There is a dog", is analysed into "There is a canoid patch of colour". Other examples of basic propositions would include, "I am hot", "That is red", "What a foul smell!"¹¹ In all of these instances, the speaker, in understanding the sentence, also sees that it is true. A basic proposition "is a proposition which arises on occasion of a perception, which is the evidence for its truth!"¹² It should be noted that all such propositions have an indexical element, hence their truth qua basic propositions is personal and time bound or transitory. But they nevertheless are the foundation of knowledge. "All theory of knowledge

must start from 'what do I know?'"¹³ Hence the foundation of knowledge is accepted to be, by Russell, subjective and transitory, in that no one can share my percepts, and with the passage of time, the meaning of the basic proposition ceases to coincide with its verifying experience!¹⁴

In the early writings of A.J. Ayer, an epistemological foundationalism is also argued for, with an interpretation of basic propositions similar to Russell's. If one expresses the sentence, "This is green", solely to designate its sense, i.e., the given empirical datum in question, then the sentence implies nothing about what is not being simultaneously experienced on the occasion of the sentence's utterance!¹⁵ The only possibility of error with such judgments is verbal error, in which the experience is misdesignated!¹⁶ Substantial error would involve the judgment going beyond the experience upon which it is based, which is ruled out by the very nature of a basic proposition. Such propositions are thus incorrigible, for they are completely verified by the presence of the sense-datum which they describe!¹⁷

The contemporary writings of Roderick Chisholm, though differing in terminology, follow the traditional foundationalist picture. However, he does make some additions which are worth mentioning. Citing Sextus Empiricus for the insight, Chisholm maintains that every object of apprehension is apprehended either through itself or through something else!¹⁸ The former kind of apprehension provides a stopping point for the regress of justification, and is what Chisholm calls a self-presenting state or property. "The mark of a self-presenting property is this: every property it entails is necessarily such that, if a person has it and also considers whether he has it, then ipso facto he will attribute it to himself!"¹⁹ These properties are psychological characteristics of the cognitive agent, such as believing, thinking, feeling, being appeared to, and so on!²⁰ Expressed propositionally, these properties serve as the foundation for knowledge. Examples would include, "I believe I know that person", or "That appears redly to me". The "believing" and

The "appearing" are immediately given states, the existence of which is one and the same with their self-attribution. Chisholm, however, does recognize that knowledge cannot be strictly understood in terms of such a foundation. The knowledge of a belief system must also be internally consistent²¹ (this can be seen as Chisholm's concession to coherentism), and the particular beliefs of the system must not disconfirm each other.²² Nevertheless, Chisholm's overall account of epistemic justification is similar to what we have already seen, in that the beliefs which terminate the regress of justification are atomic, subject relative, and transitory.

There is an added dimension in Chisholm's epistemology which I will note in passing, as it will come up again in the essay. For Chisholm, not only must a subject have a self-presenting state to justify his or her beliefs, but he or she must also be aware of the presence of such a state. That is, having a self-presenting state does not itself make it evident that one has this state. One must equally give consideration to the state's presence.²³ This raises an important point for epistemic justification. The fact that there is evidence for a belief is not a sufficient condition for knowledge attribution. The cognitive agent, in addition, must also believe that the belief is justified, for a belief could be justified without the subject knowing it. Epistemic justification thus requires a second order or meta-justification, to justify the original justification.²⁴

Finally, let us consider the writings of Schlick. I turn to him last because I believe his own account is more sensitive to the difficulties facing foundationalism, and thus one may begin to see where the theory can be challenged, if that is not already apparent. What Schlick refers to as fundamental or observation statements are the "absolute indubitable starting-points of all knowledge", "the firm basis to which all our knowledge owes the whole of whatever validity it may...possess"²⁵ Again, the examples of such statements are similar to the ones cited above: "Here now two black

spots coincide", "Here now blue is bounded by yellow"²⁶ But for Schlick, such propositions are left behind once we turn to statements usable in life or science, because our linguistic usage is not confined to simple sentences about immediate experience, and science is concerned with general statements?²⁷

Observation statements are identified according to their origin. They give expression to a personal experience which lies in the present.²⁸ To this extent, Schlick follows the theories we have already outlined, but he is also aware of the consequences of the characteristics of such statements for epistemic evaluation. Basic propositions are not identical with written or remembered statements,²⁹ for once they are so retained, they lose their immediate coincidence with their evidence, and take on the character of hypotheses, like all statements which go beyond their supporting evidence.³⁰ In the end, such statements cannot be noted down at all.³¹ But how can such fleeting, ephemeral statements serve as the ultimate, certain ground for all knowledge? Schlick grants that they cannot, and here he agrees with the coherentist. An observation statement has no duration. Its verification is made at the moment it is uttered. Having been expressed, its moment of verification passes into the past, thus the statement loses both its immediacy and certainty.³² On this kind of statement, no knowledge can be grounded.³³ But such statements are not thereby useless, for if they come at the end of the process of knowledge acquisition, "they complete the act of verification (or falsification), and at the moment of their appearance have already performed their duty"³⁴ This modification of foundationalism presents a new image of epistemic justification. The previous accounts saw knowledge as a static edifice, with the epistemic norms already defined, and the task of verification is a matter of examining whether our judgments conform to these pre-set norms. For Schlick, knowledge is a process, with appraisal coming at the end of a belief affirmation. And instead of the belief being appraised

in accord with a previously established norm, it is confirmed or disconfirmed by an experience that occurs at the moment of verification. In other words, the norms of epistemic appraisal must constantly be re-affirmed.

[Fundamental propositions in] no sense...lie at the basis of science, but knowledge, as it were, flickers out to them, reaching each one for a moment only, and at once consuming it. And newly fed and strengthened, it then flares on toward the next.³⁵

Schlick, I believe, succeeds in presenting a clearer picture of foundationalism, while at the same time exposing what others see as its fundamental weaknesses.

III

We now have a general idea of foundationalist theories of epistemic evaluation. My treatment of the few versions of the theory that I have chosen is no doubt excessively brief, but I believe that it captures the essence of the view. I would, however, like to note one final point before moving on. One may distinguish between a moderate or weak foundationalism, and a strong foundationalism.³⁶ A moderate foundationalism holds that the non-inferential nature of the founding basic beliefs is sufficient to justify our knowledge. Whereas a strong foundationalism maintains, in addition to the weaker version, that the beliefs must also be certain and incorrigible. The four representatives of foundationalism that were discussed are all strong foundationalists. But I do not believe that claims about incorrigibility are central to foundationalism, as some foundationalists have argued.³⁷ And the characteristics that have been identified as pertaining to the theory make few appeals to its strong version. My own attention will be directed towards the moderate view, and if it should prove false, then it follows that the stronger version is equally unacceptable.

IV

To see the difficulties in foundationalism, let us turn to one of its renegades, viz., Ayer. Ayer went on to reject the foundationalism that he had earlier espoused. He came to believe that the attempt to isolate a class of propositions, whose descriptive content is in complete accord with the experiences they express, to be impossible, because the two properties claimed to pertain to basic beliefs are incompatible.³⁸

Purely demonstrative expressions are in their way secure; but only because the information which they give us is vanishingly small. They point to something that is going on, but they do not tell us what it is.³⁹

What Ayer identifies here has been taken to be the major failing of empirical foundationalism. If statements expressing an immediate experience are cognitive, then they can justify other statements, but they are, in turn, in need of justification. If, on the other hand, they are non-cognitive, then they do not require any justification. But then they are equally incapable of providing it.⁴⁰ The demand that a basic belief be both a proposition and mean nothing more than an immediate experience seems to be impossible. Ayer himself recognized that statements which are personal and transitory are hardly in a position to ground our knowledge.⁴¹ Schlick's modified foundationalism is of little help in this regard. For while he recognizes that fundamental statements cannot ground knowledge, he holds that they can still serve to verify it. But this shift does not solve the problem; for the question may be rephrased to ask, how can such beliefs serve to confirm or disconfirm knowledge claims? To accomplish either requires that these beliefs be described cognitively, which would imply a meaning which goes beyond unrecordable, immediate experiences. Ultimately, it becomes difficult to see just how knowledge is founded on such beliefs, and indeed, whether there are such beliefs at all. As Kant said, "though all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it all arises out of experience"⁴² The foundationalist

project thus appears to be a failure. Underlying this criticism, however, is a conception of empirical judgments which must be clarified, as it stands in contrast to the foundationalist concept of a basic belief.

The notion of a basic belief involves a judgment coinciding with the experience described. The judgment is therefore transitory, as it makes no general claims. This absence of generality is essential to the beliefs immediacy, i.e., to the independence of the belief's meaning and truth. It is against this claim that coherentism, the alternative theory of epistemic justification, levels its attack, by arguing that such beliefs are impossible.

Generality or universality is present in all empirical judgments. In seeing a ball, for example, I classify what I see, i.e., I see something as a certain kind of thing, in this case as a ball. What is given in experience is recognized as an instance of a characteristic or set of characteristics that go beyond what is given and may be exemplified elsewhere.⁴³ This universal element of empirical beliefs always goes beyond the immediate sensory content of those beliefs. And this applies equally to the foundationist's basic beliefs. Consider the statement "That is red", or "Here now blue is bounded by yellow". In both, the subject and the object of the statements have universal import, as their meaning is not exhausted by the immediate sensation that is the occasion of their utterance. And this universality is essential to the meaningfulness of empirical judgments, for it is what is universal in a judgment that identifies the object of which the judgment is about.⁴⁴

It might be objected that in a statement like "That is red", to affirm that the demonstrative subject is a universal is to confuse the "is" of identity with the "is" of predication. "That", and other demonstratives, are not qualities. They simply identify particulars, and consequently have no universal significance. We understand what they mean by seeing what they refer to, and nothing more.⁴⁵ I cannot deal with this objection in its entirety, for to do so would take me into the vast domains of logic and

the philosophy of language. A brief comment is however called for.

For the coherentist, it is difficult to see how exactly one is to distinguish identity from predication, because it is by means of predicates that we identify a thing. "This" or "That", independent of all the features that these terms may designate, appear to be without meaning. Separated from all characteristics, demonstratives seem to be capable of only identifying the ineffable. But the identification of the ineffable is the identification of nothing.

[I]t is impossible to be conscious of a mere and indeterminate 'this' or of a bare 'here'. However simple it be, in experience there is always something not entirely indeterminate, and whatever has passed beyond the condition of sheer indeterminacy has passed, also, beyond the condition of isolation, singularity and unrelatedness.⁴⁶

Hegel has pointed out that the truth of a statement such as "That is red" depends upon the demonstrative subject of a sentence being contrasted with the subject of other demonstrative assertions. When I say, "That is red", I am not speaking of "This" thing, and so on. This contrast, according to Hegel, is essential to the meaning and truth of a demonstrative statement.⁴⁷ In Hegel's language, the meaning of demonstratives and indexicals involves negation, i.e., a contrasting with that which is other than it. And what is through negation is no longer immediate, given that its meaning depends on its relationship to these other expressions or terms. In other words, demonstratives, by which we identify things, are universals.⁴⁸ Universality is, for Hegel, intrinsic to thought, and thinking is always present in perception, such that what one observes is always observed as a universal or set of universals.⁴⁹ There is, therefore, no atomic identity which could be simply captured by a demonstrative.

Furthermore, universality, for the coherentist, is not something which only characterizes our reports of experience, but experience itself. More correctly, experience is itself judgmental, in that it involves an implicit inference, in which a sensory material is subsumed under an identifying

universal⁵⁰

Suppose that, glancing up at the sky, I see a tiny cross-shaped object and hear a certain pervasive hum. I at once recognize an aeroplane, and if questioned, I should say I 'perceived' it. But how much have I actually seen or heard? I have seen little more than a speck, and have heard nothing but a peculiar hum. Now to say that a speck plus a hum is an aeroplane would of course be absurd...Yet if the speck and hum are the only elements in the experience, how could I say I perceive an aeroplane? It is obvious that in perception something besides what is given in sensation is involved.⁵¹

And this something else is the judging activity which consciousness brings to all experience. Both the sensuous material and the universal under which it is subsumed are essential to experience. "Everything ...which is in any sense 'real', possesses the dual character of universality and unique individuality; and without this dual character nothing can enter into our experience"⁵² The attempt to burrow beneath our judgments to some judgment independent experience or fact is futile.⁵³ The sensuous data that one seeks to grasp in such an effort are already determined or "contaminated" by thought, such that "to catch them in an untouched state is really a vain attempt"⁵⁴ But lacking such an empirical ground, does not our knowledge crumble into an infinite regress of justification? For the coherentist, this does not follow from the rejection of the foundationalist's immediate empirical givens. The metaphor of epistemic justification must not be an edifice or superstructure, but a system.

v

The notion that a set of basic beliefs can coincide with a class of privileged, judgment free facts thus proves to be unacceptable to coherentism, because whatever is experienced is already mediated by cognitive activity.

Foundationalism assumes a direct experience of fact which is beyond all question, and to which thought must adjust itself, if it is to be appropriately justified. But according to coherentism, such facts are a fiction.

Truth has to copy facts, but on the other side the facts to be copied show already in their nature the work of truth making. The merely given facts are...the imaginary creatures of false theory. They are manufactured by a mind which abstracts one aspect of the concrete human whole, and sets this abstracted aspect out by itself as a real thing.⁵⁵

In other words, what foundationalism takes as the evidential basis of knowledge is actually other judgments; the implicit judgments of experience. What thus verifies an empirical knowledge claim is not its coincidence with experience, but its coherence with the judgments that comprise the background of our experience.⁵⁶ It is important to remark that for coherentism, the evidential support for knowledge is not something of a different nature from the judgments of knowledge, for it is judgments which serve as the evidence for other judgments.

What distinguishes a coherence theory is simply the claim that nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief. Its partisan rejects as unintelligible the request for a ground or source of justification of another ilk.⁵⁷

But what precisely is "coherence"? As a criterion of truth, it states that a proposition is true if it coheres or fits with a system of propositions which the cognitive subject believes, i.e., a belief is justified only insofar as it is a member of a coherent set of beliefs. For coherentism, epistemic appraisal is always done within the context of a set of judgments, hence all that one can appeal to in evaluating a belief are other judgments. What a coherence theory proposes, given this condition, is an internal criterion of knowledge; a criterion which is internal to a cognitive agent's system of beliefs.

Coherence is not simply a matter of logical consistency, which its advocates have always stressed,⁵⁸ but for which they always seem to be criticised.⁵⁹ Logical consistency is recognized as a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for coherence, for the reason that one can have a logically consistent set of beliefs, the beliefs of which are also logically indifferent to one another. Coherence demands a positive relation between beliefs. And what is traditionally

added to the demand for logical consistency is that there be a kind of inference relation between the beliefs of a belief system, so that if one belief or set of beliefs is justified, it can serve as the basis of an epistemic justificatory argument for a further belief.⁶⁰ Simplifying considerably, take the following three statements as the constituents of a belief system:

"An automobile is propelled by a combustion engine")

"Automobiles are land based vehicles"

"Steel is usually the basic component of an automobile's body"

On the basis of this system, the subsequent two statements can be epistemically evaluated:

"I drove my automobile into a brick wall, severely damaging its body"

"I drove my automobile into a brick wall, but luckily I passed right through it"

One may affirm that the first of the statements is justified, as it would follow from the first three statements of the belief system, i.e., with the latter as premises, the belief that the car was smashed upon hitting a brick wall is justified. Whereas the second statement is unacceptable, given what is expressed in the belief system (leaving aside considerations about the wall). It is this inferential relationship between beliefs that is meant when one speaks of coherence. And the more relevant the beliefs are to each other, and the greater the number of related beliefs one has access to, the tighter is the relation of inference, and concomitantly, the greater is the coherence of the belief system. It follows that there are degrees of epistemic justification, with fully coherent knowledge being a knowledge "in which every judgment entailed, and was entailed by, the rest of the system".⁶¹ The latter, as the epistemic ideal of traditional coherence theories, may be described as the strong statement of coherentism.

What is expressed in this notion of inferential relations between the

beliefs of a coherent belief system is a theory of internal relations, which is the underlying theory of meaning of coherence theories of justification and truth. Something is externally related to something else if that relation can change without affecting the nature or meaning of the two or more things related, or the natures or meanings of the things that are related may alter without modifying the relationship that holds between them. Whereas a relation is internal if the things related determine and are determined by their mutual relationships. In our example of a simplified belief system, the beliefs that one holds about automobiles are internally related, such that a change in one or more of the beliefs would alter the meaning of what one understands by an automobile. From the ideal standpoint of complete knowledge, every possible belief is related in some way to every other, so that "no knowledge will reveal completely the nature of any term until it has exhausted that term's relations to everything else"⁶²

The internal relations between beliefs is essential to the identity of that which the beliefs are about. This refers us back to Hegel's argument that all identity involves negation or difference. We understand what it is to speak of something because what we say is related to a set of background beliefs, and is contrasted with what those beliefs affirm about what we are referring to, and with what they affirm about other things which are related to what we are speaking of. "An idea always points beyond itself; it always means more than it is; it always refers to more than it includes within the circle of its explicit content"⁶³ No belief, taken individually, can therefore be seen as meaningful or open to epistemic evaluation, contrary to what the foundationalist maintains about basic beliefs. For coherentism, both meaning and epistemic appraisal presuppose an internally related belief system. To remove a belief from this context is to abstract the belief from its conditions of meaning. ("Abstraction", meaning the process of taking something singly when it should be seen within a wider whole, is

how this term will be understood throughout the essay).

It is by means of the concept of abstraction that coherentism explains error. Error arises when a belief is taken from its belief context, or evaluated in terms of a part of the belief context, and asserted to be fully justified. Whereas in such a case, the belief is not justified. Or more correctly, the belief is not fully justified, as it is not appraised by reference to the whole context of beliefs operative in determining the meaning of the belief under consideration. It is at best a partial truth, i.e., an abstraction, and therefore equally false. "Error is truth, it is partial truth, that is false only because partial and left incomplete"⁶⁴ Returning again to our simple example, if from the background of beliefs we exclude the belief that, "Steel is usually the basic component of an automobile's body", then the second belief being evaluated, about passing through the brick wall, is no longer incoherent. But this would be to ignore an aspect of the belief context. And by taking what is only relatively true for something that is unqualifiedly true, discord is introduced into the belief system. A belief is adequately justified only if it is considered in terms of the full belief context available to the appraiser. And insofar as the belief is judged relative to only a part of the context, then it is falsely justified. For coherentism, truth or falsity is never absolute, except when it is evaluated against a complete system of knowledge. But the latter is an ideal, and inasmuch as our knowledge remains incomplete, such evaluative finality is not possible. There is therefore always a degree of uncertainty in our epistemic evaluations. As there are degrees of justification, so too are there degrees of falsity. And the degree of justification depends upon the completeness of the system which serves as the evaluative norm⁶⁵

It is important to call attention to the fact that for the coherentist, error, like truth, can only be identified from the vantage point of a more inclusive belief system.

An error...is an incomplete thought, that to a higher thought, which includes it...is known as having failed in the purpose that it more or less clearly had, and that is fully realized in this higher thought. And without such higher inclusive thought, an assertion has...no error.⁶⁶

Which is to say that we become aware of error only after it has been identified as such, this implying a contrast between the erroneous belief and the correct belief (and the belief system which justifies the correct belief) which supplants it. As with Schlick, the confirmation or disconfirmation of a belief comes at the end of the process of knowledge acquisition. But whereas with Schlick, the evidence for or against a belief was a transitory, single experience, for coherentism it is the belief system of a cognitive agent.

Yet how does this notion of a belief system, as the criterion for epistemic evaluation, halt the potential infinite regress of belief justification? Is not the chain of justifying beliefs endless, thus making knowledge impossible, as the foundationalist claimed? On what basis can coherentism avoid postulating a class of basic beliefs? The answer to these questions can be seen in how the coherentist conceives the inferential relationship between beliefs. It cannot be understood as the simple relationship between the antecedent and consequent of a single hypothetical statement, because more is involved in the meaning of these two parts of a hypothetical than their explicit content, taken singly. The antecedent implies the consequent because both belong to a wider system of beliefs, and to grasp the implication is to grasp them as members of such a system.⁶⁷

'If I leap[?] from the top of the Empire State Building, I shall be a sorry mess at the bottom'. Why yes, if I carry no parachute, if my body retains its mass, if the law of gravitation continues, and so on.⁶⁸

One of the foundationalist's objections to coherentism is that because there are no basic propositions, and because beliefs form a system, justification ultimately moves in a circle. It would do so, however, only if it is assumed that the inferential relation between beliefs is linear, so that at one point in the chain of justification, there would be a belief or set of beliefs which once were the conclusion of a justificatory argument, now serving

as the premises for such an argument.⁶⁹ But this is not the case because the inferential relation is not linear. Inference, and consequently justification, is systematic or holistic. That is, there is not a linear dependence between justified and justifying beliefs, but rather a relation of mutual, reciprocal support.⁷⁰ Each belief is related in a manner that each can be justified in terms of the others, with the direction of the justifying argument depending on which belief or set of beliefs, within the belief system, is being challenged on a particular occasion.⁷¹ A coherentist may accept a set of foundational beliefs in a specific situation of epistemic appraisal. Such a foundation, though, is of a provisional nature, being motivated solely by the particular circumstances of the appraisal. The "foundational" beliefs have no special epistemic status in relation to the belief system as a whole.

A foundation used at the beginning does not...mean something fundamental at the end, and there is no single 'fact' which in the end can be called fundamental absolutely. It is all a question of relative contribution to my known world-order.⁷²

VI

The discussion of the coherence theory of epistemic justification has perhaps been protracted, but this is because there are significant dimensions of this theory which play a prominent role in the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty. Also, in outlining coherentism, I did not contrast individual thinkers, as I did with foundationalism. The reason for this difference is that in the case of coherentism, there are fewer divergencies between the individual thinkers. Furthermore, in noting the differences between foundationalists, the theory's weaknesses came to the fore. I do not believe that this is necessary in the case of coherentism, as its difficulties are more readily apparent.

VII

The first problem that arises is with regard to coherentism's solution to the infinite regress of belief justification, a solution the foundationalist finds circular. It is maintained that both the regress and the circle are avoided by the fact that the justifying relationship between beliefs is systematic, with the question of the epistemic justification of any one belief or set of beliefs being determined, on any particular occasion, in relation to their belief context. This solution, however, is tenable only insofar as one sees epistemic justification as a "local" matter, i.e., epistemic evaluation is not demanded of the entire belief system, but of only one belief or set of beliefs, which always have a background of further beliefs. But foundationalism is not motivated by merely a "local" problem, for it too could stop the regress of justification. What the foundationalist claims, though, is that such a termination of the chain of epistemic justification is arbitrary. And any epistemic justification based upon an arbitrary ground is as good as no justification. Coherentism, by confining questions of epistemic appraisal to a small part of a belief system, accordingly raises arbitrariness to a principle, thus undermining its own claims to providing an adequate criterion of knowledge. The foundationalist does not deny that our evaluative practice halts the regress of justification at some point. But the added question is raised about what justifies, in the end, the belief system as a whole. Without an answer to this question, all our knowledge remains uncertain. And coherentism seems to fail to give such an answer. It is for this reason that empirical foundationalism appeals to a special class of beliefs which coincide with immediate empirical givens. This both grounds our knowledge as a whole, as the evidential foundation of knowledge is external to the belief system, and establishes a contact between our beliefs and the objective world we seek to know.

Recall that the problem of knowledge emerges with the recognition of the ever present possibility of a discrepancy between a subject's beliefs and the world that is the object of those beliefs. Foundationalism, by grounding knowledge in immediate experience, is able to identify a kind of knowledge which eliminates this possible discrepancy, and thus outline a norm with which to evaluate all other knowledge. Coherentism, on the other hand, as a criterion which is internal to a belief system, cannot assure the correspondence of the beliefs with the world. Accordingly, it cannot give an answer to the question of how our knowledge as a whole is verified. In a sense, coherentism is an answer to a question that was never raised, viz., how a particular belief or set of beliefs is to be epistemically evaluated.

A consequence of this is that coherence, as a candidate for a criterion of empirical knowledge, is a criterion which makes no appeal to empirical evidence. The coherence of a belief system is solely a matter of the internal relations of the system's individual beliefs. It depends upon nothing external to the system. It would appear to follow that empirical beliefs can be adequately justified in spite of being utterly out of touch with the empirical world they purport to be about.⁷³ A criterion of empirical knowledge, it seems, would at some point demand an appeal to empirical evidence, as an essential requirement for the evaluation of empirical beliefs. If not, in what sense can one still speak of such a criterion as a criterion for empirical knowledge? Coherentism, therefore, "if taken seriously, deprives empirical propositions of all meaning".⁷⁴

Lacking a reference to belief independent evidence, coherentism faces another difficulty. Namely, that it provides no way by which to identify one uniquely justified belief system. That is, there can be multiple, incompatible systems of belief which are equally coherent, and which therefore are all equally justified. But this makes nonsense of our notions of justification

and truth, for we are thus unable to discriminate between conflicting sets of empirical beliefs.⁷⁵ This criticism of coherentism has come to be known as the plurality objection, and has been raised by all critics of the theory.⁷⁶

Coherence, as a criterion of empirical knowledge, thus appears to be confronted with insurmountable difficulties. Can we then return to foundationalism, with its postulation of basic beliefs? The criticisms of coherentism are strong, but its alternative is also not without problems, as we have seen. We thus appear to encounter an irresolvable dispute; a choice between a Scylla and a Charybdis, neither of which is inviting. It is at this point that the phenomenologist becomes suspicious, as the question occurs of whether the conflict between these two explanatory models of knowledge is not the result of theoretical presuppositions which each party brings to the analysis of knowledge; whether each has a concept of empirical knowledge which experience must meet, rather than seeing if epistemic evaluation, as it occurs in our everyday lives, may not reveal a different and actually operative criterion.

The difference between foundationalism and coherentism is rooted in their respective conceptions of empirical beliefs, which, in turn, provide the two opposing norms of epistemic evaluation. For the foundationalist, empirical beliefs can be analysed into a class of basic beliefs which coincide with immediate sensory givens, from which other, more complex beliefs can be built up and evaluated. Coherentism, failing to recognize this need for an external, evidential basis of beliefs, fails as a theory of empirical knowledge. But for the coherentist, such basic beliefs do not exist. All experience involves judgment. Therefore, there can be no coincidence between what is sensuously given and the belief about that given. There is a sensory content in our empirical judgments, but it cannot be analysed out of the judgments of which they are a part, for any grasp of such a content always presupposes implicit judging activity on the part of consciousness. Without this possibility of getting outside beliefs in our awareness of reality,

the criterion of knowledge must be internal to our beliefs. And "coherence" presents an obvious choice.

Both of these theories make claims about the nature of experience and its conditions of intelligibility. And on the basis of this, develop or justify their criteria. Following Merleau-Ponty, let us turn to experience to see if either description of it is appropriate. If not, we will have reason to question the criteria, and possibly be in a position to develop an alternative.

VIII

Before turning to this, however, I would like to raise one further problem, not only for these two theories, but for epistemology as such, which has not been given sufficient attention.⁷⁷ The problem can be simply put: epistemology is impossible because it involves an inherent circularity or unjustified assumptions.⁷⁸ Chisholm has recently brought this issue to the fore, but as the epigraph to this chapter suggests, Plato already had some awareness of it. Chisholm identifies two questions which are central to epistemology:

a) What do we know?

b) How are we to decide whether we know? What are the criteria of knowledge?⁷⁹

The difficulty arises from the fact that one cannot answer one of these questions without presupposing an answer to the other. I can only state what I know if I already have a criterion of knowledge. And I can only identify a criterion of knowledge if I already have access to instances of knowledge, from which a criterion can be generalized. In either case, one is assuming something which cannot be assumed if the study of knowledge is not to beg the question about what we know or how we know.⁸⁰ In other words, if epistemology is to be the science of knowledge, then it cannot

assume what it claims to establish. And as traditional epistemology has claimed to be a presuppositionless examination of the conditions of knowledge, and if the above dilemma cannot be solved, then epistemology would seem to be impossible.

[T]he theory of knowledge, according to its philosophical claim, is an enterprise directed at the whole. It is concerned with the critical justification of the conditions of possible knowledge in general. It cannot renounce radical, that is unconditional doubt. The methodical meaning of its approach would be inverted if it bound critique to conditions (that is if it allowed presuppositions) that are themselves the preconditions of the critique of knowledge without being subject to it.⁸¹

This critique of epistemology was also voiced by Hegel, as he noted this difficulty in Kantian critical philosophy. The assumption of such a philosophy is that before one examines actual cognitions of reality, one must first understand the nature of cognition as such, i.e., its norms and limits.⁸² But the difficulty here is readily apparent, as Hegel pointed out.

[T]he examination of knowledge can only be carried out by an act of knowledge. To examine this so-called instrument is the same thing as to know it. But to seek to know before we know is as absurd as the wise resolution of Scholasticus, not to venture into the water until he had learned to swim.⁸³

All epistemology is, for Hegel, caught in this circle. Without an understanding of the criterion of knowledge, the science of knowledge cannot take place.⁸⁴

In examining knowledge, one cannot begin without a norm by which to distinguish true and false knowledge. But no criterion is justified at the beginning of one's investigations, since the justification of the criterion is precisely among one of the results that one hopes to achieve in the study of knowledge. Consequently, if a criterion is unavailable, epistemology cannot begin.⁸⁵

The force of this argument should not be underestimated. Jürgen Habermas has contended that Hegel's argument is conclusive.

It is directed against the intentions of First Philosophy. For the circle in which epistemology inevitably ensnares itself is a reminder that the critique of knowledge does not possess the spontaneity of an origin. As reflection it is instead dependent on something prior and given, which it takes as its object while simultaneously originating in it.⁸⁶

And Chisholm is no less aware of its significance.

"The problem of the criterion" seems to me to be one of the most important and one of the most difficult of all problems of philosophy. I am tempted to say that one has not begun to philosophize until one has faced this problem and has recognized how unappealing, in the end, each of the possible solutions is.⁸⁷

If epistemology can only be pursued within the context of unexamined presuppositions, then its claims to philosophical primacy must be doubted. It invariably rests upon something else, and the interesting question is what this "something else" is. But of far greater importance are the implications this has for our understanding of norms as such, which is to say rationality. The greater part of our philosophical tradition has prided itself on the possibility of a detached reason, of the ability to evaluate epistemic and moral claims, in accord with rational principles. But if norms are always conditioned, in what way must we alter our notion of reason? Does the recognition of the situatedness of reason lead to a post-modern nihilism, to the proclamation that reason, as our final god, is dead? Or should we persist in our search for an absolute reason? These questions are far reaching, and I by no means will pretend to answer them to any sufficient degree. My more modest concern is with epistemic rationality. And using Merleau-Ponty, I hope to show that this problem of the criterion can be met, which, in turn, will illuminate the possible direction in which to find answers to the questions about the general nature of rationality.

We may ask whether the dilemma raised by Chisholm is not again the consequence of theoretical demands on how epistemic justification should function, as opposed to how it does. Let us therefore heed Husserl's words of going back to the things themselves, that is, to experience.

Chapter Two

Unearthing the Roots

The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible.

Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray

I

The discussion of the two competing criteria of epistemic justification, and of the problem facing epistemic criteria in general, has led to an impasse; an impasse that is rooted in, I suggested, theoretical preconceptions which distort our actual experience of epistemic evaluation. We saw that the conflict between foundationalism and coherentism is based on a fundamental disagreement over the nature of our awareness of experience. Let us then turn to that experience, with the aid of Merleau-Ponty, to see if we might not be betraying it. Merleau-Ponty, in his major work, the Phenomenology of Perception, never deals explicitly with questions about criteria of knowledge. He does, however, criticise two theories of perception, which he terms sensationalism or empiricism, and intellectualism. And these theories are parallel to the two conflicting pictures of our grasp of experience, as outlined in coherentism and foundationalism! Hence by examining Merleau-Ponty's critique, a solution to the impasse may appear.

II

The central thesis of sensationalism is that atomistic data-qualities are the basic constituents of what we experience. According to Merleau-Ponty, this thesis is founded on the constancy hypothesis, which postulates the existence of a one to one or homological causal relationship between the world, as an objective and determinate reality, and the percipient? These basic constituent sensations are the immediate empirical givens expressed in the foundationalist's basic beliefs. The sensory content of such beliefs is grasped independently of all other experiences, and is fully captured in a basic proposition. But contrary to sensationalism, there is nothing in our experience which corresponds to this description. Phenomena do not present themselves as collections of accidentally related sensa, but rather as significant forms or gestalt, structured along figure-background relations? I experience a figure, for example, my bed, against the background of my room; the latter being intrinsic to the significance of what I see. My bed rests upon the floor, against a corner of my single room. Various pieces of furniture surround it, and a painting overhangs it, and so on. If the background were to alter significantly, such as my room being replaced by the local library, so too would the meaning of what I see as my bed. Considering a more extreme alteration, if my room's floor were to all of a sudden fall away, though my bed remained suspended in mid air, my understanding of what I see would undergo an even greater change. In these examples, there is no homological correspondence between the bed and myself as a percipient, as is entailed by the constancy hypothesis, because the meaning of the figure which I experience alters with a change in its background, while there occurs no accompanying alteration in the actual one to one relation between the figure and my perception of it.

What this shows, for Merleau-Ponty, is that phenomenal figures are

experienced as meaningful only insofar as they appear within a total form, with a change in the form changing the meaning of the figure, and vice versa. In other words, phenomena appear within internal, intentional relationships, which are sundered if one accepts sensationalism. The relationships are internal because the meaning of each part of what I see is tied to the meaning of the other parts and their interconnections. These internal relations, though, are not the conceptual or propositional relations that were a part of coherentism, for they are present in experience itself. In addition, the links are intentional, for the figure-background structure only takes shape in relation to a subject. One always experiences reality from a vantage point, and depending on the many possible interests that one may bring to experience, specific figures will emerge from an empirical background, whereas other figures will pass into the background. Experience, articulated by a figure-background structure, contains more than simply atomic qualities. It is above all, inherently meaningful. That is, I do not experience incoherent sense-data, and then set about ordering them. Instead, I always experience a meaningful world, with identifiable entities within a wider background context, or what Merleau-Ponty calls a phenomenal field.

Perception, analysed in terms of sensations, is reduced to what is immediately and presently given. If this were so, then the figure-background relationship would collapse⁴ because the latter implies that in our perceptual experience, there are unperceived aspects of both the figure and the background, which are just as much a part of the meaning of what I see, as those aspects that I directly experience. For example, the bed I am looking at has sides which I cannot presently see. This is also the case for everything that surrounds my bed. Nonetheless, I take the bed, and what surrounds it, to be three dimensional objects. Lacking this, which is to say, without their hidden features, I would not see what I do, as the kinds of things I take them to be. This reveals an element of indeterminacy in our experience, as an

intrinsic part of the meaning of what one sees is based on what is hidden from view. According to Merleau-Ponty, this is not due to some failing on our part⁵. It is, on the contrary, a positive phenomenon, for the indeterminacy is essential to the meaningfulness of our experience, i.e., to the figure-background relation.

Sensationalism cannot appeal to association to account for the phenomenal gestalt, because as long as it holds to the thesis that experience is comprised of basic, simple data, association can only establish an external relation between qualities, thus never accounting for the coherence of the phenomenal field. If sensationalism were true, then the world would break up into atomistic components: And what we would be left with is not our empirical world with its elements differently related, but a completely different world⁶.

The pure impressions of the sensationalist are undiscoverable and imperceptible in actual experience⁷. The apprehension of any quality is bound up with a whole perceptual context⁸. When we turn to experience itself, what we find is a domain already pregnant with irreducible meaning⁹. Sensationalism, as a description of experience, is therefore false, in that it does not accord with what we experience. The foundationalist's immediate empirical givens thus prove to be a myth; a myth generated by theoretical demands for a foundation of knowledge. Such sensory givens are the product of analysis, and not something that we actually experience.

Merleau-Ponty's critique of sensationalism is analogous to the coherentist critique of foundationalism, in that he basically shows that there is no immediate experience. In this claim, Merleau-Ponty sympathizes with coherentism, as he himself says of empiricism, that it is "the system least able to give an inclusive account of experience as it is revealed to us, while on the other hand reflection [intellectualism] embraces empiricism's subordinate truth and assigns to it its proper place"¹⁰. There is, nevertheless, an

important difference between the two critiques, because for Merleau-Ponty, the mediation of our experience occurs at the level of experience itself, i.e., empirical reality presents itself as an internally related field. Whereas for the coherentist, mediation is introduced by an implicit act of judgment, which is an essential condition for the identity of empirical objects. This difference is the basis of Merleau-Ponty's objections to intellectualism.

III

Intellectualism, though seemingly the opposite of sensationalism, suffers from the same error, viz., the acceptance of the constancy hypothesis!¹ This can be seen in the intellectualist analysis of attention. Attention is conceived as an unconditioned power which is indifferent to the nature of that which it attends. It reveals the intelligible structure of objects, which consciousness has itself brought to those objects. Hence our knowledge of the world is indirectly a knowledge of consciousness. In this case, the homological relationship is between the constituted object of consciousness and the structure of consciousness!² Any indistinctness or indeterminacy in the empirical object is a consequence of erroneous beliefs about the attended object, and not something intrinsic to it!³

But such an understanding of attention, in which the intelligible structure of reality operates independently of consciousness, for it is an a priori structure of the latter, makes of attention an ineffective power. Attention is, on the contrary, a creative agency, in being both a new way in which consciousness approaches objects, and a new articulation of objects in the indeterminate reality of the phenomenal field!⁴ This process is creative because the figure-background structure is not given to a passive consciousness. How it forms depends upon the percipient's interests, as he or she perspectivevely

confronts a phenomenal field with hidden dimensions. Hence to attend to an object is to focus upon an aspect of a part of the field, thus bringing about a figure-background relation. Intellectualism fails to grasp this creativity because it uncritically accepts the postulate of an objective world, as the immanent end of knowledge!¹⁵ The distortion this engenders is notable in the intellectualist view of the relation between perception and judgment.

Judgment is introduced into the explanation of experience as what sensation lacks to make perception possible. It is that which interprets the matter provided by the senses!¹⁶ This, however, is contrary to the experienced distinction between experience and judgment!¹⁷ The introspective evidence seems to deny the identification of perceiving and judging, for we appear to be able to perceive without judging, and judgment has many features which are not shared by perception!¹⁸

The opposition of sensation and judgment within perception in turn forces an appeal to judgment to account for perceptual error!¹⁹ What is sensorily given is never itself illusory. It is rather the subsequent judgment on the sensory content (the act of subsumption) that leads to possible delusive experience, as a result of mis-identification. Therefore, error is grounded entirely in the act of judging. But the intellectualist is faced with the question of how, on his or her theory, one can distinguish between veridical and illusory perceptions?²⁰ If the reply is that the normal percipient judges only on the basis of adequate signs and coherent material, then the distinguishing feature of the two kinds of perception is that in one, judgment is motivated by veridical experience, and in the other by illusory experience?²¹ It thus follows, however, that contrary to judgment theories of perception, there is an original difference between veracity and falsity in experience, prior to any judging activity. Hence to perceive is not to judge. The sensible, as was shown in the critique of sensationalism, already possesses an intrinsic

meaning, and consequently requires no act of interpretive judging²² As Merleau-Ponty describes it, perception already has a constituted syntax, which makes judgments about perception possible, but of which judgments are only an optional expression²³

The intellectualist appeal to judgment, to account for perceptual error and for the meaningfulness of experience, is therefore redundant, because experience is already meaningful without the addition of judgments, and hence the distinction between true and false perceptions is equally intrinsic to experience. This also applies to the coherentist analysis of perceptual judgments. By accepting the empiricist account of perception, viz., that the material content of experience is sense-data, the coherentist is obliged to introduce judgments to explain the intelligibility of experience. But this is to answer the problems of one theory by formulating another. Whereas if one turns to experience, the whole judgment theory is seen to be superfluous, because the empiricist analysis of experience is a misdescription of experience.

In showing that experience is inherently meaningful, and that judgments are only a possible way of expressing that meaning, Merleau-Ponty makes common cause with the foundationalist, for what he has pointed out is that if one accepts judgment theories of perception, then one loses contact with the very thing one is trying to understand, viz., experience. But Merleau-Ponty does this without breaking perception down into its supposedly basic, atomic constituents. There is no need to appeal to immediate empirical givens to assure our relationship with the world, for we have such contact, and what we experience are the complex entities of our everyday world.

For Merleau-Ponty, both sensationalism and intellectualism commit the same error. They both presuppose that an objective, determinate world confronts the percipient, with the difference between the two being that in the former, subjectivity comes to recognize objective truth as given, whereas in the latter, it is constituted by subjectivity, in judging²⁴ But once the prejudice of objectivity, which is entailed by the constancy hypothesis, is rejected,

the possibility of a new kind of reflection is opened up²⁵ A reflection devoid of theoretical presuppositions, which discloses the phenomenal field of our primitive contact with the world. The theoretical demand for objective determinacy, present in both sensationalism and intellectualism, falsifies our experience, because there is no such determinacy present in experience. What we do experience is a meaningful field ordered along a figure-background structure. This field is multi-faceted, some of the facets of which are not immediately present in what we see, but they nevertheless are a part of the meaning of our perception. Experience is therefore indeterminate and uncertain. For this reason, the phenomenal field cannot be made directly and totally explicit. It is this that Merleau-Ponty calls pre-objective experience. And it is this internally related and intentional reality of pre-objective experience which grounds the world as characterized by objective, predicative knowledge. The error of sensationalism and intellectualism is to take the criterion of objectivity and impose it on pre-objective experience, when this cannot be done. Sensationalism and intellectualism describe what we ought to see, and not what we do see²⁶

The precise nature of the grounding relationship between pre-objective experience and objective knowledge will be left to the next chapter, as will be a more complete elucidation of this experience itself. For the moment, let us just²⁷ briefly state what all of this implies. For Merleau-Ponty, the recognition of the rootedness of our thought in pre-objective experience calls for a reform of understanding, so that phenomena may be accurately grasped²⁷ What the phenomenal field of pre-objective experience reveals is a consciousness confronted by indeterminate empirical objects, with a meaning which is "lived through", and not constituted by subjectivity; and as indeterminate, a meaning which cannot be assimilated to objective thought²⁸ According to Merleau-Ponty, it is the primary task of philosophy to lay bare this experience. "Consciousness must be faced with its own

unreflective life in things and awakened to its own history which it was forgetting: such is the true part that philosophical reflection has to play"²⁹ As such, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is a critique of foundationalism's and coherentism's analysis of experience, and consequently an implicit critique of these two theories as criteria of empirical knowledge.

IV

The question that must be asked is whether the criticisms made by Merleau-Ponty hold up; whether one cannot challenge his characterization of the two opposing theories. The obvious objector is coherentism. Merleau-Ponty's critique of intellectualism, that the intellectualist can distinguish between veridical and illusory perceptions only by appealing to the sensory content of experience itself, and thereby rendering judgments redundant, assumes that one refers to adequate empirical signs to make this distinction, whereas this is not the case in the intellectualist tradition of coherentism. The criterion one resorts to is not perceptual, but is the coherence of the perceptual judgments with the other judgments of one's belief system. No reference whatsoever is made to sensation, because the idea of pure, immediate sensory givens is dismissed as unintelligible. Merleau-Ponty's critique of judgment theories of perception only affects those theories that are founded on an epistemological dualism after the manner of Kant. That is, theories which hold to a concept of two sources of knowledge, such as Kant's sensuous intuition and a priori concepts,³⁰ so that any judgment about experience presumes a conceptual synthesis, which is verified by examining experience, the objects of which are in turn the result of a parallel conceptual synthesis.

Traditionally, coherentist's have explicitly rejected any such dualism,³¹ especially if it came to play a role in the epistemic evaluation of judgments. But admittedly, the coherentist tradition has had an ambiguous attitude

towards the Kantian dualism, arguing that there is no clear way to differentiate the intuitive content of a judgment from its conceptual component, while nevertheless persisting with the distinction, leading one to assert, with Merleau-Ponty, that something "of the empiricism which it surmounts always remains in intellectualism - something like a repressed empiricism"³²

This tension, if not outright contradiction, can be seen in the writings of most coherentists. Bernard Bosanquet, for instance, affirms that the idea of being able to grasp sensuous data independently of all judgment is impossible.³³ "[W]hen we come to judgment in the strict sense, the task of drawing a line between implicit inference and what is not inference at all becomes an impossible one"³⁴ Yet at the same time, he sought to maintain the notion of sensuous content as a guarantor of our contact with the world and as that which explained the sheer presence of empirical reality.

[T]he whole of sense-perception has a peculiar quality in being present. Artificial though it is, it yet, relatively speaking, contains an irreducible datum. It is distinguishable from everything which is not present. It is pervaded by something which we cannot reduce to intellectual relation, though if we withdrew from it all that is relation, the apparent datum would be gone.³⁵

The antagonism here is apparent, and it runs throughout the writings of this philosophical school. Francis Bradley claimed that both sensuous intuition and judgment are essential to our understanding of experience, but that the former is ultimately an irrational surd. As was the case for Bosanquet, it accounts for the presence of empirical reality, but whether there really are such judgment independent data, we can never know.³⁶ Brand Blanshard argued that in practice, we cannot draw a line, in perception, between what is given and what is thought.³⁷ Nevertheless, it does not follow that there is no such distinction, for without it, the material world would be reduced to thought.³⁸ But this is obviously not the case, and one must simply accept that sensations cannot be grasped in their own nature.³⁹

[W]hile presumably there is some line between the given and its extension, we may almost assume that there is not. For any line that we actually draw proves arbitrary and inconstant.⁴⁰

The origin of this difficulty is rooted in Hegel. The conclusion of of the dialectic of sense-certainty, in the Phenomenology of Spirit, is that singularity is unutterable, untrue, and irrational⁴¹. In experience, we do not envisage the universal⁴², but insofar as our experience is intelligible, then what we grasp are universals. Sensible appearance, as individual, is evanescent. What is permanent, and therefore intelligible, can only be grasped by reflection. And what is thus apprehended are universals. "[T]he universal is the ground and foundation, the root and substance of the individual"⁴³ Individuals are, at best, the foundation for the initial act of reflection, which in turn, cognizes universality as the individual's principle of intelligibility⁴⁴. Devoid of universality, our experience would be an experience of nothing.

The object in its existence without Thought and Notion is an image or a name: it is what it is in the determination of thought and Notion. They alone are of real importance; they are the true object and content of reason, and whatever is elsewhere meant by object and content in opposition to these is valid in them and through them alone.⁴⁵

This recalls coherentism's account of the conditions of intelligibility of experience, that was discussed in the last chapter. The ability to see in things the embodiment of universals is the condition for perceiving anything. "Indeed we may say confidently that there is no stage in experience, not even pure sensation, if such a stage exists, in which universals are not present"⁴⁶. Consistency with this condition requires that the particular sensuous content of experience, as particular, play no role in epistemic evaluation. As an irrational surd, it is difficult to see how it could play such a role, or if it does, then the sensuous content must itself be conceived as universal, with it functioning as a kind of judgment upon which a perceptual judgment is formed⁴⁷. All awareness, empirical or otherwise, involves universality, and therefore all awareness is cognitive. "Knowledge is the medium in which our world...exists for us"⁴⁸. Accordingly, considerations of truth and falsity occur only at the level of judgments, and not of experience.

In Hegel's terms, at the level of the Idea⁴⁹

A significant consequence follows from this. If an empirical object, to be identified, must be subsumed under universals, and nothing so far said by Merleau-Ponty would seem to undermine this, then can we still speak of a thing which is independent of its universal properties? And if not, what has happened to particularity? According to coherentism, the qualities which characterize an object are universal, hence they cannot be used to individuate an object. To say of a particular that it is a collection of qualities and something more is to beg the question about what this something more is. Our experience seems to be inherently identificatory, and therefore inferential. Hence the particular would need to be something which cannot be experienced. But if it cannot be experienced, can we even affirm that such a thing exists? The conclusion that we are led to, following the coherentist account of experience, and what is a central thesis of coherentist objective idealism, is that there are no particulars, for what characterizes an object, and all that we experience is an object's characteristics, is universal⁵⁰. And if experience is inherently inferential and universal, then Merleau-Ponty's whole description of perceptual experience as pre-objective is put into doubt.

If what we intelligibly experience are universals, then our experience is objective, and consequently it makes no sense to speak of a pre-objectivity at this level. And if Merleau-Ponty rules out objectivity in experience, then it seems that the very possibility of experiencing identifiable objects is denied. Can Merleau-Ponty account for the identity of empirical objects on the basis of his figure-background analysis? If not, then Merleau-Ponty's critique of intellectualism appears to fail, because he does not fully examine the position, and insofar as he is incapable of answering the previous question, intellectualism presents a serious challenge to his whole notion of pre-objective experience. The coherentist conception of experience undermines any theory

which claims that what we experience are particulars, and that particulars are comprehensible. The affirmation that universality is the condition for the intelligibility of our experience seems to have some force. But, one may ask, is this not contrary to the experienced distinction between judgment and perception? Perhaps, but for the coherentist the ultimate tribunal of truth is coherence, and if an experience does not fit with the overall system of beliefs which explain a phenomenon, so much the worse for the experience. This experienced difference could be nothing more than a psychological curiosity. Indeed, all of Merleau-Ponty's descriptions of experience could be dismissed as such, whereas the objective, real world is quite different.⁵¹ Merleau-Ponty wishes to assert the primacy of perception in understanding the meaning and truth of objective, predicative knowledge. But such knowledge seems to leave perception behind, and also appears to impede access to experience, as it is described by Merleau-Ponty. And inasmuch as this is a feature of all thought, then Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology cannot disclose a pre-objective world.⁵²

V

The general objection raised here is not original, and nor can it be dismissed lightly. Merleau-Ponty's claim that his phenomenology attempts a direct description of experience, as it is, is weakened, if not made impossible, by the fact that any such description goes beyond experience, understood as pre-objective. The effort to achieve a direct contact with experience, as was pointed out in the case of foundationalism, is not only inconceivable, but if it were possible, it would render thought impossible. What many have pointed out is that Merleau-Ponty's thesis of the primacy of perception drowns thought in perceptual immediacy, thus eliminating one of the essential conditions of thought, viz., a reflective distance between thought and what

is thought about⁵³

The general method by which one reveals pre-objective experience has also been criticised. The return to the things themselves, which involves a bracketing of all theoretical presuppositions, is deemed to be impossible, because all language contains such presuppositions, hence any description of experience cannot be theory free.⁵⁴ Furthermore, linguistic description is inherently objective, i.e., universals are employed in any description, therefore any attempt to describe pre-objective experience rules out the disclosure of such experience, given the nature of descriptions.⁵⁵

It is also claimed that though Merleau-Ponty may have succeeded in showing how objective thought arises from pre-objective experience, he gives no account of the former. We are given a genetic analysis of the origin of thought, but no such analysis can replace a clarification of thought itself. To affirm the contrary would be to commit a genetic fallacy.⁵⁶ A Descartes, for instance, could accept everything Merleau-Ponty asserts about the origin of thought, while at the same time maintaining his own position on the grounds that he is concerned with the nature of thought as such.⁵⁷ A more developed version of this criticism points out that Merleau-Ponty's critique of intellectualist theories of perception assumes that the latter's theoretical constructions can be seen as substitutes for perception, as it occurs pre-reflectively.⁵⁸ This critique, however, is irrelevant, because Merleau-Ponty has failed to realize that the purpose of such constructions is to explain the epistemic evaluation of perceptual reports.⁵⁹ The epistemic appraisal of perceptual knowledge claims is not obliged to reproduce the experience that lies at the basis of these claims.⁶⁰ In other words, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology collapses the traditional distinction between the "sphere of justification" and the "sphere of discovery", or between prescription and description. Concerns with the former need not consider the latter. What Merleau-Ponty does is describe the origins of our knowledge of experience, and then claim

that the intellectualist description of experience is false. But what he has failed to realize is that the intellectualist is not interested in describing experience, but in showing the conditions for the cognitive evaluation of empirical knowledge. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological descriptions, in relation to this task, are nothing more than the characterization of curious and perhaps revealing psychological particularities.

A final question that has been asked of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is what is the epistemic status of his descriptions of pre-objective experience?⁶¹ Knowledge has usually been seen as objective. Do Merleau-Ponty's descriptions then provide objective knowledge of a pre-objective world? This would seem to be impossible. Then do they give us "pre-objective knowledge"? This appears to be a contradiction in terms. Is then pre-objective experience non-cognitive? If so, then how can we be aware of it, given the coherentist analysis of understanding? And if one accepts that pre-objective experience is non-cognitive, then any description of it, as it is itself, is outside the realm of epistemic appraisal. But then, again, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is reduced to interesting descriptions of an individual's experiences. As one commentator was led to say, Merleau-Ponty's ideas are "better expressed in literature and in painting than in philosophy"⁶².

One must remark that Merleau-Ponty was aware of these difficulties. In a discussion, after a presentation to the Société française de philosophie, commentators raised many of the above objections. It was pointed out that philosophy was born of the difficulties and ambiguities of perception, which it has attempted to resolve by disclosing and articulating an intelligible world. To demand that philosophy return to experience is to destroy philosophy.⁶³ Philosophy would never have begun had it not gone beyond experience.⁶⁴ It was also stated that the attempt to describe pre-objective experience is contradictory.⁶⁵ In addition, the claim was made that scientific knowledge has more and more removed its postulates and implications from our everyday

experience, and to maintain that the latter grounds the former is to misunderstand the development of science.⁶⁶

Merleau-Ponty also recognized these difficulties in his own writings.⁶⁷ He concluded his first major work by taking note of the central question facing his philosophy.

Can we conceptualize perceptual consciousness without eliminating it as an original mode; can one maintain its specificity without rendering inconceivable its relation to intellectual consciousness?⁶⁸

The Phenomenology of Perception sought to provide an answer to this question.

I do believe that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy provides the means by which to deal with these many objections, and in doing so, indicates an alternative to foundationalism and coherentism. But before turning to this, I wish to briefly consider how other commentators have tried to meet these difficulties.

VI

Unfortunately, commentary on Merleau-Ponty is almost uniformly lacking in any thorough examination of the relationship between pre-objective experience and objective thought. The most common way of treating the many questions about this relationship is by ignoring them. One simply repeats Merleau-Ponty's own ways of expressing the interconnection between these two domains of awareness. For example, H.L. Dreyfus and S.J. Todes, in replying to an article which raises many of the problems cited above,⁶⁹ merely reaffirm that the life-world serves to ground objective thought, without confronting the problems involved in such a claim.⁷⁰

Albert Rabil, Jr., asserts, following Merleau-Ponty, that cognitive categories are derived from experience, and says that this, however, leaves the question as to how to judge whether an original experience is true or false, unanswered.⁷¹ And he goes on to state that this could not have been otherwise, because Merleau-Ponty "always maintained that there is no absolute

evidence"⁷² The fact, though, that Merleau-Ponty rejects absolute evidence is beside the point when it comes to the issue of whether or not he had an account of epistemic justification; an account that his philosophy requires if it is to be more than idiosyncratic description.

Ronald Bruzina, in commenting on Merleau-Ponty, simply repeats Merleau-Ponty's claims that pre-objective experience eludes the categories of objective thought because it is that which precedes and grounds such thought.⁷³ The question as to how this grounding relation works, or why precisely pre-objective experience escapes objective thought, is left unanswered.

Laurie Spurling, in answer to the question of how pre-objective experience is to be comprehended or elucidated, says that it, although unreflective, is not thereby unconscious, i.e., it is potentially capable of being brought to light. What Spurling then sets out to describe is the founding relationship that Merleau-Ponty understands to exist between pre-objective experience and objective thought, and which Merleau-Ponty characterizes as a "Fundierung" relationship.⁷⁴ But Spurling's discussion remains unsatisfying, as he fails to deal with the problems facing this relationship.⁷⁵ Furthermore, he follows this discussion with the claim that Merleau-Ponty does not explicitly concern himself with criteria of adequacy for confirming what he describes phenomenologically, because philosophy creates truth by revealing a connection between things which were not seen before.⁷⁶ Yet from the fact that Merleau-Ponty did not explicitly concern himself with such criteria, it does not follow that this issue is irrelevant to his thought. Again, to ignore this question is to render Merleau-Ponty's thought philosophically insignificant.

Samuel Mallin's work on Merleau-Ponty's philosophy also, to a large extent, only reasserts Merleau-Ponty's original claims that cognition is parasitic on perception, sublimating the latter in its own internal principles.⁷⁷ No explicit attempt is made to go beyond Merleau-Ponty's own formulations in accounting for how this relationship functions, and how the many difficulties

involved can be met.

The more poetic answers to the problems raised note that the task of phenomenology is not to describe pre-objective experience with objective language, but rather, citing an expression of Merleau-Ponty's, to "sing the world".⁷⁸ But such solutions are hardly philosophically satisfying, and they appear to be contrary to Merleau-Ponty's own intentions.

A recent article by Joseph Rouse, on what he calls Merleau-Ponty's existential conception of science, makes some interesting points, but, in the end, he fails to adequately explain the relationship between pre-objective experience and objective, scientific knowledge. Rouse draws an analogy between the meaning of scientific theories and the meaning of pre-objective experience. He himself concentrates on the phenomenon of speech in his exposition, but I believe we can pass over this part of his argument, for what he wishes to show is that the figure-background structure is present in the meaning of scientific theories, as well as at the level of experience.⁷⁹ A part of the background of any figure, which has yet to be mentioned and discussed, is time. When applied to scientific theories, this includes the history of the theories, i.e., their development, discovery, invention, etc.⁸⁰ Severed from this historical context, as with any figure removed from its temporal background, theories are abstract and improperly understood. The objectivity of scientific theories, like that of the perceptual object, is rooted in a pre-objective background; in the case of theories, a pre-objective scientific context. The background of scientific theories is pre-objective because it can never be fully apprehended, and yet it is nevertheless a part of the meaning of a theory.

Merleau-Ponty might not have quarreled with Rouse's description of science, but as to helping us understand how science is grounded in pre-objective experience, his argument fails. Rouse has interpreted pre-objective grounding as something that can be provided for every particular kind of objectivity,

such that scientific theories have their own pre-objective scientific ground. Merleau-Ponty, however, makes a stronger claim. His central thesis is that all objective knowledge is rooted in the pre-objectivity of perception. Rouse reduces the primacy of perception to something of marginal interest. Indeed, the thesis would become false, as each kind of knowledge would have its own context, which could be characterized as pre-objective, in Rouse's sense.

So ends our brief discussion of commentary on Merleau-Ponty; a briefness not entirely of my choosing, as most examinations of Merleau-Ponty ignore the problem of the relationship between pre-objective experience and objective knowledge, and the epistemological issues connected with this problem. We may conclude this chapter with a reference to one final essay, written by Thomas Munson. Munson's paper suffers from many of the same weaknesses discussed above. But he does end his article with an observation which is, in part, to the point. Merleau-Ponty's answer to the problems he confronts is of the "proof-of-the-pudding-is-in-the-eating" type, in that in approaching experience and knowledge as he does, one must keep in mind the following question: Does Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology increase our understanding of these two kinds of awareness?⁸¹ In the next chapter, we will begin to answer this question.

Chapter Three

The Indeterminate Foundations of Knowledge

...we can know more than we can tell and we can tell nothing without relying on our awareness of things we may not be able to tell.

Michael Polanyi, Personal knowledge

I

John Wild characterized the relationship between the life-world and the world of objective knowledge, the latter being paradigmatically embodied in scientific knowledge, as a war of worlds! Melodramatic value aside, such a characterization does little to clarify the relation of the two worlds, and it suggests an anti-scientific attitude which is foreign to the writings of both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. As we saw in the opening chapter, neither Husserl nor Merleau-Ponty rejects science. What is being challenged is rather an interpretation of science which masks the origin of science's meaning and its evidential roots. But beyond Husserl's initial claims that the life-world is the meaning ground of science and the ultimate source of its evidence, the nature of the connection between these two spheres remains unclear.

How is it that objective, scientific knowledge has a pre-objective ground? One of the minimal standards for a theory's being scientific is that no "personal" human element influence its content? This is a basic and essential condition for the objectivity and universality of science. Pre-objective experience, however, is not subject independent. On the contrary, we have

described it as necessarily related to an intentional subjectivity. To affirm that this experience grounds the sciences would thus appear to violate this criterion. Then how is science founded? Consider the law of gravitation, $F=Gmm^1/r^2$, which states that force equals the gravitational constant times the mass of the first object times the mass of the second object, all divided by the distance of separation between the two objects squared. In what way is this law related to transitory, subject relative, pre-objective experience? How is the law verified by such experience? As long as such questions remain unanswered, life-world phenomenology is left vague.

Furthermore, the idea of pre-objective experience itself is not without difficulties. And we have raised questions about how descriptions of such experience are to be epistemically evaluated, if they indeed can be. Traditionally, it has been argued that a necessary condition of knowledge is the objectivity of belief. When I make a truth claim, I state that something holds for something, i.e., a determinate quality is asserted of something. For instance, the statement, "Human beings are rational animals", makes an objective assertion about human beings. It is true or false independently of any relationship to the subject uttering the expression. As objective, the statement's truth value is universal and timeless. For any "human being", whenever or wherever he or she exists, it is the case the he or she is rational. The objective, propositional content of expressions in turn accounts for the public nature of judgments. It explains the many possibilities of how different persons are able to affirm the same statement; how the same person can assert the same statement at different times; how one person may have different psychological or propositional attitudes towards what is asserted by the same statement, such as at one time believing it, and at another time, being sceptical towards it. The postulation of the inherent objectivity of propositions is deemed to be necessary to demonstrate how these many possibilities can be understood. Associated with this notion of objectivity is that of determinate meaning,

for if the significance of a proposition altered with the context in which it was uttered, or with the different subject's who uttered it, then truth would be impossible. Therefore, the demand for objectivity in knowledge is equally a demand for determinate knowledge. The absence of one feature implies the nonoccurrence of the other, and hence the absence of knowledge. The idea of a non-objective or indeterminate knowledge is a contradiction in terms. And consequently, so is a phenomenology which seeks to describe, and provide us with knowledge of, a pre-objective, indeterminate experience, as it is experienced. "[P]hilosophy moves essentially in the element of universality"³ and to attempt otherwise, is to destroy philosophy.

II

What I aim to accomplish in this chapter is the following. First, I will develop an internal critique of the traditional conception of knowledge that was just outlined, in an effort to show that objective, empirical knowledge must be evidentially grounded in an indeterminate experience, as the latter is described by Merleau-Ponty. Taking scientific knowledge as representative, I will demonstrate that the truth and meaningfulness of scientific statements depends on an inherently indeterminate, pre-objective experience. I designate my critique an internal one because I will examine scientific knowledge in its own terms, revealing its incompleteness relative to its own criteria. Having accomplished this, we will be able to see how pre-objective experience grounds objective knowledge, and subsequently be capable of dealing with the major criticisms that have been made against this thesis. Concluding this will be a brief account of what Merleau-Ponty means by pre-objective experience. We will thus be in a position to elucidate, in the following chapter, a theory of epistemic justification for the descriptions of a non-Husserlian phenomenology.

III

Let us begin by considering a classical model of scientific knowledge, viz., that of Carl Hempel. What distinguishes the empirical, natural sciences from the non-empirical sciences is that the theories and laws of the former are open to empirical verification.

The former seek to explore, to describe, to explain, and to predict the occurrences in the world we live in. Their statements, therefore, must be checked against the facts of our experience, and they are acceptable only if they are properly supported by empirical evidence⁴

Empirical verification or testability is one of the two basic criteria for a scientific explanation⁵. It is recognized that theories and hypotheses are often expressed in terms that do not occur in the descriptions of the empirical findings upon which they rest, and which they serve to explain⁶. But this gap is overcome by means of bridge principles which connect the theoretical and empirical domains, and thus permit the verification of theoretical laws⁷. Without such principles, a theory would not have any explanatory power, for it would have no empirical import. That is to say, it could not serve as a scientific theory.

What is important in this model is that the empirical verification of a theory is itself objective⁸, i.e., it is the objective features of experience that confirm or disconfirm a scientific hypothesis. The law of gravitation, for instance, is not verified by my dropping a stone to the ground. The verification requires a controlled empirical test, which takes into account multiple variable factors that may influence the experiment, and it concentrates on those characteristics of experience which can corroborate or falsify the quantitative relations said to hold between the elements of the law. This raises serious questions with regard to the phenomenologist's claims about the primacy of the life-world. There is nothing in the verifying experience of science resembling Husserl's pre-predicative or Merleau-Ponty's pre-objective experience. Neither of these two descriptions characterize

empirical reality, as an object of scientific inquiry. As Michael Oakeshott has pointed out, science begins only when observation, conceived in terms of personal perceptions and sensations, has been left behind.

The world of scientific experience is...created by a transformation of our familiar world; in science there is no attempt to elucidate the character of this world of perception in which we live, what is attempted is the elucidation of a world of absolutely stable experience... Scientific experience is based upon a rejection of merely human testimony; its masterconception is stability.¹⁰

And this stability is attained by examining experience under the rubric of quantitative relations.

The qualitative features of experience that Husserl and Merleau-Ponty seek to describe are superseded in science's desire for objective verification. One cannot therefore assert that pre-objective experience is the evidential ground of scientific knowledge because the latter requires empirical confirmation to be justified. That scientific knowledge claims must be empirically justified is acknowledged, but the experience which accomplishes this is not the pre-objective experience of the life-world. Husserl should have been attentive to this, inasmuch as he tried to explain the evidential role of the life-world by saying that it is in this world that one perceives the many instruments of measurement that are employed in the testing of hypotheses!¹¹ But the fact that the actual instruments used in experiments are observed in their qualitative features is irrelevant to the testing of a hypothesis, for what the scientist is interested in are not the instruments as such, but the quantitative measurements that the instruments record. Hence, from the fact that scientific theories require empirical verification, it does not follow that the experience that is appealed to is the phenomenologist's pre-objective experience.

For the empirical testability of scientific theories to be objective, experience must be viewed in a particular manner. Empirical reality itself must have objective, determinate characteristics, which can serve as the objective empirical evidence for a theory. This objectivity is usually

understood in quantitative terms, but the particular nature of empirical objectivity will not be of concern to us. Instead, I wish to examine whether or not what we experience can be conceived as objective.

In the opening section of this chapter, we saw that the idea of objectivity is connected with a family of related notions: subject independence, universality, timelessness, and determinacy of meaning. All are, it is claimed, essential aspects of intelligibility, which itself is comprehended as conceptual apprehension. The intelligibility of empirical reality is no exception. The coherentist analysis of experience thus reappears. To experience a thing is always to experience it as something. And what classifies the perceived thing is a universal. This classification is necessary to the identity of an empirical object. To experience a thing that was not any kind of thing, would be to experience nothing. We have already examined the many elements of this theory, hence there is no need to repeat ourselves. And we have also seen its consequences, which I now wish to study more closely.

If the identification of empirical entities demands a subsumption of sensory material under a universal or set of universals, then there can be no particularity, for "what gives apparent particularity to any character or complex is itself always universal"¹² It is of no benefit here to distinguish between universalia in rebus and universalia ante rem, asserting that the former avoids this difficulty, because the question that has been posed is how the original particular, which serves as the basis for the abstraction of a universal in the first conception of universality, is identified if not by means of a subsumption.

The affirmation, however, that all that we experience are universals is strikingly counter-intuitive, since prima facie, we do appear to experience particular objects. Is there not some alternative to viewing a particular as a congeries of universals, which in the end dissolves the particular into its properties? The foregoing theory has been termed the bundle or

cluster theory of particularity, as a particular is seen as nothing more than a cluster of universal characteristics.¹³ The proposed alternative to this view, which seeks to explain the apparent existence of individual entities, is the theory of bare particularity, the inheritor of the Aristotelian concept of substance. A bare particular is that in which properties inhere, or that to which they pertain. Yet its being is not exhausted by its possible features, and it is that which confers individuality on the cluster of properties which characterize a thing.¹⁴ The difficulty with this idea is the rather odd nature of the bare particular. It is a kind of being devoid of any characteristics. As such, it can neither be experienced nor conceived. Which is to say that it has no criterion of identity, and for this reason, many have thought it to be a rather dubious kind of thing.¹⁵

The distinction between attributes and things is not a distinction between attributes on the one hand and some occult and featureless substratum on the other; it is a difference between characters taken severally and the same characters grouped together for special causes or ends. That the plain man supposes there is more to thinghood than this is no doubt true, but the substance he does believe in dissolves on analysis.¹⁶

Attempts have been made to defend the concept of bare particularity, by arguing that such things can be known.¹⁷ Following Russell, a distinction is made between two kinds of knowing: knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by recognition.¹⁸ The second is a knowledge of characteristics, and by means of such cognition, one cannot know individuals.¹⁹ But individuals can be known through a non-descriptive knowledge.²⁰ Admittedly, this is a knowledge of the ineffable.²¹ Nevertheless, one is thus able to grasp individuals ostensively, through the use of demonstratives.²² However, we have already seen that it is difficult to understand this kind of cognition as knowledge, and that insomuch as demonstratives do designate anything, they have universal or descriptive content. That is, they are not wanting in qualities, even if it be the simple contrast between demonstrative expressions. If there were no such contrast, then a demonstrative could not pick out a particular.

Hence demonstratives do have a universal significance, and we thus return to the point from which we began, viz., that we do not experience particulars.

This is tied to an added difficulty. If what has been argued above is correct, then empirical knowledge is a knowledge of universals. But universality is a necessary characteristic of laws, according to Hempel²³ Are we then to inquire into what empirically verifies empirical knowledge? The prospect is an infinite regress, for we appear to be caught in a web of universal statements which cannot be empirically verified, for insofar as our access to empirical reality is inferential, then that reality can only be known through further universal statements. Yet it was the model of scientific knowledge, with which we began, that demanded this concept of experience, and subsequently led to this conundrum. The very requirements of scientific explanation make one of the criteria of such explanation, viz., testability, unattainable. Coherentism led to a similar consequence: a theory of epistemic evaluation for empirical knowledge is outlined which has no reference to the empirical world. We are thus faced with two conclusions which follow from the understanding of experience demanded by the verification of scientific theories and laws: particulars cannot be experienced, and science is not empirically verifiable. There is no doubt some discomfort with both of these consequences, and therefore reasons for questioning the path of the argument hitherto presented.

IV

The phenomenologist raises the suspicion that the above conclusions are the result of a theoretical conception of intelligibility which is forced upon experience, rather than being a consequence of a thorough investigation of experience itself. It is to the latter that we will now turn, approaching experience unencumbered with preconceptions about the nature of empirical

meaning. The aim will be to be faithful to experience, in the hope of discovering some of its inherent features. Two things appear to be immediately obvious: that experience is intelligible or meaningful, and that we experience particulars. I presently see a pen in my hand, writing on a particular piece of paper, that rests on an individual table. The contention that all such experiences presuppose an inference from, or subsumption of, that which is given to the senses, and that ultimately what one experiences are universals, appears to be contrary to our experience. But this cannot be simply asserted. If it is the case that we experience particulars, then we must be able to give an account of how empirical objects are identified, without reducing that identity to subsumption.

When I look around me, I behold a multiplicity of objects, each related, in one way or other, to all the other objects within my perceptual grasp. When I focus upon one such object, the others fade from my immediate attention, and form a background context for the thing that I am attending. While I concentrate upon my lamp, I am aware of the fact that it is resting on my desk, that directly behind it stands a wall with a portrait, that various papers and pens lie at its base, that a bookshelf stands immediately to the left of it, and so on. In addition, the lamp only presents one aspect of itself to me, for I do not perceive all of its sides in one perception. Nevertheless, I take the lamp to be a three dimensional figure, and fully expect that if I were to turn it, I would discover other facets of the lamp which would be contiguous with the original aspect that I saw. I also experience what I see, and its background with a temporal dimension. I have recollections of what I saw a moment ago, and expect that I will perceive certain things in the immediate future. I see my lamp as something with a past, something that has persisted through time, and as something that will continue to exist into the future, for some number of years. The same durability applies to the various features of the background of the lamp. There is, therefore,

both an external background and an internal depth to an empirical object, which, though I do not directly perceive them, are nonetheless a part of my experience.

These two dimensions of an experience may be referred to as, following Husserl, the external and internal horizons of an empirical entity. This horizontality, as we saw in Merleau-Ponty's description of experience, is not something extraneous to the objects of my experience. On the contrary, it appears to be essential to the meaningfulness of a thing. If the table upon which my lamp rests were to suddenly disappear, or if I were to discover that it was incapable of supporting objects such as lamps, and if my lamp continued to be suspended at its present height, then I would have reason to doubt that what I was seeing was a lamp. In like manner, if, as I turned the lamp, I failed to discern any sides or back, i.e., if my lamp proved to be a two dimensional object, then again, I would have cause to question whether what was before me was properly identified as a lamp. Parallel considerations hold for the external and internal temporal horizons of the lamp. In all of these cases, the horizons of the object play an essential role in the significance of the particular thing. Without them, the objects of experience would lack any coherent identity.

It is to be noted that this horizontality is not a finite set of determinate properties or characteristics that can be fully elucidated by the percipient, because it encompasses the entire background against which an object appears. The external and internal horizons of an object are potentially infinite. "[I]t is of the nature of the real to compress into each of its instants an infinity of relations"²⁴ with that which appears to us varying with our spatial location, our direction of attention, our interests and purposes, and with the background itself. This infinitude of an object's horizon, and its variability, renders it impossible that the horizon be grasped in a single conscious apprehension, thus making the meaning of the particular

object and its horizon fundamentally equivocal. This is not to say that a part of the horizon of an entity may not, in turn, become an object of my scrutiny. But this shift in attention would only generate a new figure-background relationship, with a new horizon emerging around the object of present concern. Furthermore, and tied to the infinitude of the horizon, are the horizon's hidden aspects, the non-visible dimensions of a figure and its background, which though non-visible, are also a part of the meaning of what we see. This visually absent, though meaningfully present, constituent of experience adds another element of indeterminacy to empirical reality. This is not due to us, as percipients. It is rather an inherent feature of what we experience.

The meaning of an empirical object is therefore intrinsically indeterminate. To attend to an object is to bring it forth from an indeterminate horizon, i.e., insofar as I concentrate on one figure or single facet of a figure, other figures or other facets, or other parts of the external and internal horizon of an object, are concealed. "Every perception is the perception of something solely by way of being at the same time the relative imperception of a horizon or background which it implies but does not thematize"²⁵ Experience involves both that which is given, i.e., the immediate appearance presented to a subject, and the transcendent, which is the non-immediately given horizons of an entity. This transcendence into the horizontality of empirical objects is never exhaustive or final, given the horizon's infinitude and equivocality. Hence an empirical object always remains indefinite or indeterminate, but nevertheless constant. The indefiniteness, as well as the constancy, is general, in the sense that the unperceived aspects of an object's horizon are never precisely determined by those that are perceived. And yet the indeterminacy is not total, for one has usually some idea of what to expect with the further exploration of an object. "In the case of my lamp, I know, if what I do see is a lamp, that it must have a backside, that it must be

coloured, etc., and that these aspects are in some way contiguous with what I presently see of the object. But the backside need not be of the same colour as the side which is facing me, and the backside itself can take many forms. Husserl believed that this determinate generality is structured by an a priori typology of spatial temporal objects. That is, that what we experience has invariable structures, which it is the task of phenomenology, as a science, to reveal.²⁶ On the basis of the preceding description of experience, however, there are no grounds upon which to make such a claim. Indeed, as hitherto described, experience would seem to rule out the possibility of such an a priori order, as Merleau-Ponty pointed out. "[P]erceived things... are open, inexhaustible systems which we recognize through a certain style (emphasis mine) of development, although we are never able, in principle, to explore them entirely, and even though they never give us more than profiles and perspectival views of themselves"²⁷ We will come to see more clearly what is involved in this notion of "style", but the basic idea is that the constancy of an object is not determined by a universal, a priori schema. It is, instead, something limited and circumscribed by an object's own particular horizon.

And it is in virtue of the constancy provided by an object's horizon, that individual empirical entities are identified. This is not the identity arrived at by means of the subsumption of a given under a universal, because empirical objects are not identified by isolating a finite set of features which characterize a thing, or capture its essence. The identity of a particular thing involves a relation to other things, i.e., identity involves difference. Contrary to Hegel, though, this is a difference which cannot be sublated in a final identity, because each aspect of what is presented contains an infinity of relations. To reduce identity strictly to subsumption is to emasculate empirical reality, by transforming it into a set of determinate characteristics. We however, as experiencing subjects, can never fully cognize the objects of our experience, because of the essential horizontality

of all experience. It is the analysis of identity as subsumption which cannot explain the identity of empirical objects, for its concept of identity eliminates empirical objects. In other words, the identity of individual empirical entities is explained by demonstrating that individual empirical entities cannot be identified, and therefore the problem dissolves. But we have now seen that this account of identity is unnecessary, in that it brings to experience a notion of intelligibility which is foreign to experience, and which is not required to explain how particular empirical objects are identified.

Our description of experience has shown that the empirical world is inherently meaningful, that experience is identificatory without the subsumption of particular empirical givens under universals. The two initial conclusions about experience have therefore proven to be premature, for we do experience particulars and science is consequently empirically verifiable. However, the experience which serves as the evidential basis for scientific theories and laws is quite differently conceived from that which has the same function in the Hempelian model of scientific explanation. For the latter, experience is objective, with all the accompanying notions that this concept implies. But the consequence of such an understanding of experience is the impossibility of verifying scientific knowledge.

If experience is what verifies scientific knowledge claims, and if that experience is indeterminate, then determinate scientific knowledge rests upon indeterminate experience. Which is to say that the objectivity of science, and of empirical knowledge in general, presupposes the indeterminacy, and hence non-objectivity, of experience, as its evidential ground. Science is able to acquire determinate knowledge, but only by concentrating upon a finite set of features of the indeterminate horizon of experience. Yet insofar as it ultimately purports to describe and explain an empirical world populated with particulars, then it is always dependent upon non-objective,

indeterminate experience for its evidence.

This applies equally to the meaning of the concepts employed in science. The theoretical entities to which these concepts refer are not directly observable. One may go further and state that reality, as described by objective knowledge, is not observable at all. And as we appeal to indeterminate experience to verify such knowledge, so too is the meaningfulness of this knowledge rooted in the same experience. The feeling of warmth and coldness is the basis for my understanding of every quantitative measurement of these two qualities. Without this experience, a thermometer reading, for example, would have little significance. If one defines colour (citing the Oxford dictionary) as the effect on the human eye of light-vibrations of a particular number and character which are reflected by the molecular constitution of the surface of a body, the definition will be almost meaningless if one has not experienced colours. Before I can set about defining blue in this manner, and if I am to know what I am speaking of, I must have experienced blue. The same applies to all objective descriptions of empirical phenomena. This is not to argue for a positivistic theory of meaning, because the meaning of objective knowledge is not reducible, without remainder, to experience. There is a conceptual meaning. But this is of a highly abstract nature, and by itself, it is not what we understand by an objective knowledge claim about our experience. We do not, for instance, comprehend the above definition of colour strictly in its own terms. Implicitly presupposed in our comprehension is the experience of colour.

What is thus established is a connection between pre-objective experience and objective knowledge; a necessary connection, inasmuch as empirical objective knowledge is verifiable and meaningful. The affirmations made about the primacy of perception, as argued by phenomenologists, are now clearer, and the outlines of a theory of empirical knowledge, in contrast to foundationalism and coherentism, begin to take shape.

The appeal to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology was motivated by the hope that his philosophy would aid us in circumnavigating the opposition between foundationalist and coherentist accounts of the experience that serves as the evidence for empirical knowledge. We saw early on that the foundationalist's immediate empirical givens were nowhere to be found in experience. But Merleau-Ponty's original critique of intellectualist or judgment theories of perception applied only to those theories which accepted a Kantian epistemological dualism. This left untouched the coherentist analysis of perception which, in turn, posed a challenge to the idea of pre-objective experience. A consequence of coherentism, however, was that empirical beliefs lose touch with empirical reality. And this was the case with any analysis of empirical knowledge in which it is argued that knowledge is verified by objective experience. We have now seen that a necessary condition for the verification and meaningfulness of objective empirical knowledge is its grounding in pre-objective experience. Both foundationalism and coherentism, as self-sufficient explanations of empirical knowledge, and as accounts of the type of experience which verifies that knowledge, are abstractions. By turning to experience itself, we have come to recognize that it is comprised of particulars, without for that reason being a collection of sensuous data, and that it has an intrinsic intelligibility which is independent of conceptual universality. The nature of the meaning of empirical reality is a combination of the two extreme positions.

Though experience is meaningful without conceptual subsumption, what I see as possessing an internal horizon, I see as a particular kind of thing. The object before me appears as a lamp. This object is not first given to me as a collection of data which I then order under the concept "lamp". Instead, it is given to me, in experience, as a lamp. The reason for this

is that the external background horizon of the object renders it that I see a lamp. The external horizon of any object of experience is an ordered, internally related context which gives meaning to any of its particular parts. And as was remarked, this is not the coherentist's internally related beliefs, but the relationship between the various parts of the phenomenal field. In addition to the spatial dimension of an object's horizon, to which the most attention has been given, there is also a temporal dimension, which gives an empirical object a history. And not only an individual history, but also a cultural-social one. All the objects of my experience have the meaning they do given a very specific cultural context. And cultural traditions introduce language and other social institutions into an entity's background. Every one of these factors plays a role in how we experience something. This may sound exaggerated, but I believe that if one gives some thought to our experience, one begins to realize how complex a process it is, in that a multitude, if not an infinity, of factors contribute to the significance of any single empirical object.

These many horizontal aspects of an object, which play a role in specifying the object's identity, are beyond the grasp of the percipient, in the sense that they are not immediately present in a single perception, and they are not something over which the individual subject has control. The figure-background relationship of experience is subject relative, but it is not something the subject chooses to create. The percipient can select what part of the phenomenal field he or she wishes to attend (though this is also limited by the horizontality of our experience, because the horizon presents to us, at any one time, only a finite number of possible objects of perception). But the given horizon itself cannot be chosen, for it is the percipient's reality. In Merleau-Ponty's words, because "we are in the world, we are condemned to meaning"²⁸ As a result, the world, as meaningful, is a given, and not the product of our cognitive activity. Long before a subject makes

an explicit judgment, the world already has meaning.

At the level of experience, there is a unity of "sensuous content" and "intellectual form". Indeed, these expressions are inappropriate to characterize our experience, for at this level, no such distinction can be made. There is an element of universality in experience, in that what we experience is always kinds of things. But the universality in this case is not something distinct from the singularity of the empirical objects. One may subsequently abstract from the singular entities of experience, though within experience itself, there is a unity of universality and particularity, i.e., a concrete universality, in the sense that the meaning of an empirical entity has a generality of significance relative to the particular entity's horizon.

[W]e cannot apply the classical distinction of form and matter to perception, nor can we conceive the perceiving subject as a consciousness which "interprets", "deciphers", or "orders" a sensible matter according to an ideal law which it possesses. Matter is "pregnant" with its form, which is to say that in the final analysis every perception takes place within a certain horizon and ultimately in the "world".²⁹

The whole idea of perceptual subsumption, which is implied by the dualistic theories of empirical knowledge, is somewhat obscure. In coherentism, the notion of the empirical given is maintained to explain the "presence" of the empirical world. It also serves as a kind of premise for the implicit inference that is involved in experience. The coherentist's givens, however, are just as obscure as the foundationalist's. And the question that occurs, for the coherentist, is why one is obliged to infer from the given, one thing, as opposed to another? This is left unanswered. If what is given is devoid of qualities, then it is difficult to see how one can claim that such a thing exists, and, more importantly, the implicit inference in experience becomes incomprehensible, thus undermining the belief that experience is judgmental. Whereas if sensory content does have characteristics, then how one judges depends upon the initial experience of this content. But then Merleau-Ponty's critique of intellectualism holds, for what is experienced is already meaningful, and therefore the added implicit judgment is redundant.

The conclusion of all this is that we do not experience anything as something. Rather, we simply experience kinds of things. One may describe something that one sees as something, but in experience itself, there is no such distinction. Kant was correct in stating that thoughts without content are empty, and that intuitions without concepts are blind.³⁰ But in analysing experience as a unity of opposing notions, experience becomes unintelligible, for it either ceases to be experience, as with coherentism, or it is reduced to meaninglessness, as is the case with foundationalism. The problem with both of these schools is that they first theoretically divide empirical givens and intellectual cognition, and then attempt to discern how they relate to one another, not realizing that once such a conceptual distinction is made, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to explain how they interact.

VI

Given what has been established about the nature of pre-objective experience and its relation to objective knowledge, we can begin to deal with some of the questions and objections that were previously raised. In the second chapter, one basic criticism was made of the thesis affirming the primacy of pre-objective experience. It is asked how phenomenology can aim to express this experience, as it is lived, when it is an intrinsic feature of thought to objectify? That is, any linguistic description of pre-objective experience, as the product of reflective thought, invariably distorts that experience. The central point is that there is a fundamental contradiction in the attempt to capture reflectively, and thus objectively, any experience which is pre-objective. In coming to grips with this difficulty, we must further deepen our understanding of the foundational relationship so far elucidated, by analyzing Merleau-Ponty's own interpretation of the Husserlian concept of Fundierung, which was mentioned in passing.

According to Merleau-Ponty, the relation of pre-objective experience to objective thought is as follows. Pre-objective experience is primary in the sense that objective thought is a predicative explication or determinate expression of that experience, which subsequently prevents the experience from re-absorbing the predicative thought.³¹ Three claims are made here. First, that pre-objective experience is the source of meaning of objective thought. Second, it is also pointed out that objective thought is the predicative expression of the significance of pre-objective experience. This refers to phenomenological descriptions which seek to capture the fundamental experience, as well as to scientific knowledge, which only very indirectly describes pre-objective experience, and then only in an abstract fashion. The difference between these two modes of description is one of degree, rather than type; a difference in the degree of abstraction from the original experience. And lastly, the claim is made that objective thought has a kind of independence from its ground, which prevents it from being identified with that ground.

Merleau-Ponty goes on to say that pre-objective experience is not primary in the empiricist sense, and that objective thought is not derived from it, since it is through objective thought that this experience is made manifest.³² Merleau-Ponty thus rejects any verificationist theory of meaning. And more importantly, he denies that objective thought can be derived from pre-objective experience, as from a premise, because it is only through reflective, predicative thought that we discern pre-objective experience. Hence the independence of pre-objective experience is qualified, in that it is revealed only through thought. This reflects what Merleau-Ponty calls a "double-edged" relationship,³³ a relationship of mutual grounding which creates dependence, and allows for independence.

Pre-objective experience presupposes conscious reflection. The phenomenal field manifests the activity of thought. Not in the sense that it is a creation of thought, after the manner of coherentism, because any explicit

judgment only captures a small part of the field. But once a judgment is made, i.e., once the meaning of pre-objective experience is linguistically articulated, it becomes a part of the horizon of our experience; a part of the cultural background, which we can return to, to re-identify what is experienced.

There is a parallel here with an aspect of Saul Kripke's "causal" theory of linguistic reference. In naming something, there is, what Kripke calls, an "initial baptism", in which a linguistic term picks out a thing in the world, and by which the thing is then known.³⁴ The name subsequently becomes a part of the linguistic community, passing from one speaker to another.³⁵ The continuous reference of the name is accordingly determined by the fact that each speaker is a member of the community of speakers who employ the term, and not by a cognitive grasp of what the name means.³⁶ Merleau-Ponty speaks of an originating speech, which he says literally causes the object to exist, or changes it.³⁷ But once spoken, speech settles into a "sediment", a kind of cultural linguistic heritage,³⁸ giving a linguistic expression, which is to say an objective articulation, to the horizon of our experience. A publicly or intersubjectively meaningful world is thus created, which we are born into, and which we, as cognitive and linguistic agents, reaffirm. "[F]ormer acts of expression, establish between speaking subjects a common world"³⁹ Pre-objective experience is therefore always permeated by thought, a sort of "solidified" thought, which is the unity of form and content that was spoken of earlier. The Fundierung relation is thus twofold. Pre-objective experience is the meaning and verification ground of explicit judgments. In addition, within pre-objective experience proper, there is the reciprocal relation which exists between sedimented judgments or form and sensuous content. And as the form is itself the result of past explicit judgments, the original grounding relation is also reciprocal.

An experience divorced from all thought, as one finds in foundationalism,

is an experience ignorant of itself⁴⁰ "[T]here is no pure and absolutely unexpressed life in man; the unreflected comes into existence for us only through reflection"⁴¹ It must be stressed that this is not the constituting thought of judgment theories of perception. In formulating a judgment, one brings to explicit linguistic expression a meaning already present in experience; a meaning which is itself the embodiment of past linguistic activity, and which forms part of the horizon of our present judgments. Sedimented linguistic meaning, as a dimension of the horizontality of experience, shares in the horizon's indeterminacy, such that we can never exhaust this meaning, and there are aspects of it, of which we are unaware.

The horizontality of an experience of a particular entity, about which a judgment may be made, is equally the horizon of the judgment. As the horizon is intrinsic to the meaning of the experienced figure, so too is it intrinsic to the judgment's meaning. One is not here dealing with two radically different types of reality, for a judgment is only an explicit articulation of empirical meaning. It is in this sense that pre-objective experience is dependent on objective thought. Merleau-Ponty describes phenomenology as "the laying down of being"⁴² as the study of the advent of being to consciousness.⁴³ What he means by such statements is that pre-objective experience only comes to be through reflection. Judgments, however, remain dependent on pre-objective experience, both for their verification and their meaning; an experience which has already been "worked on" by past judging activity.

Is the contradiction, that the critics find at the heart of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, thereby removed? I believe that it is, because this criticism fails to fully consider the nature of pre-objective experience. There is no contradiction in attempting to describe what is pre-objective, because the latter is already linguistically formed. And phenomenological descriptions merely express this meaning in explicit statements. Phenomenology is not a return to immediate experience and nor is it the abandonment of philosophy

for life, because one cannot grasp such experience, and life, for Merleau-Ponty, is not a substitute for philosophy.⁴⁴

But do not descriptions of pre-objective experience render such experience objective? To answer this question, recall the traditional conception of objectivity that was outlined in the opening of this chapter. There we saw that this concept is associated with a series of other notions: subject independence, universality, timelessness, and determinacy. The last has already been examined. Seeing that the horizon of a judgment is the same as that of an experienced figure, and that for both, the horizon is intrinsic to their meaning, and given the characteristics of a horizon, then the meaning of judgments is indeterminate. This does not mean that a judgment's meaning varies with each speaker, or that one cannot affirm the same statement at different times, or that one is unable to take up different propositional attitudes towards a fact, because the horizon of a cognitive subject provides the required constancy for the identity of a statement's meaning, as it secures the identity of the objects of perception. We, as individuals, do not choose the significance of our expressions. The horizon gives to us a language and a meaningful world about which we may judge. Furthermore, the significance of judgments is not the universal and timeless meanings presumed to be the properties of propositions. For the constancy of a statement's meaning is relative to a horizon which is temporally and historically determined. But again, constancy is not altogether undermined.

Accordingly, the judgments we make about pre-objective experience do not violate or betray that experience, because they are not objective in the traditional sense. On the contrary, the meaning of judgments shares the same features with that of pre-objective experience, except that the former is expressly predicative, whereas the latter is only implicitly so. An objectivity which presumes to attain a determinate, subject-independent, universal and timeless significance is illusory. No such objective meaning

is possible, given the primacy of perception. Phenomenological descriptions are objective, but it is what we may term a concrete objectivity.

When Merleau-Ponty speaks of pre-objective experience, he is not referring to some mysterious domain of human awareness. Rather, he is calling attention to our everyday experience which cannot be captured in objective thought. Such experience is not thereby subjective, in the sense of being confined to the transitory psychological states of consciousness. It is pre-objective in relation to the concrete objectivity of descriptions of it, in that it does not depend on explicit judgments for its existence. But insofar as it depends upon the concrete objectivity of judgments in general, it shares in the characteristics of that objectivity, as well as determining them. A statement that strives for an objectivity greater than that of the descriptions of pre-objective experience, becomes an abstract objectivity, as it is increasingly divorced from the origin of its meaning. But the difference here, as was noted, is one of degree, because the meaning of the objective statements of science, for example, are equally determined by the horizontality of pre-objective experience. The determination, though, is less direct, as science is not so much concerned with describing pre-objective experience, as explaining it conceptually. Yet as differing only in degree with descriptions, scientific knowledge may also, and does, become a part of our horizon of experience. As such, its conceptual statements add new meaning to what we see. For instance, one often hears it said in everyday conversation, that black and white are not colours. Implicit in such assertions is a physical definition of colour. But in becoming a part of the horizon of experience, such statements lose their abstract significance, for they determine our experience of particulars. That is, the physical definition of colour, for example, as part of the empirical horizon, is meaningful only in and through pre-objective experience, so that when I see what I call black, I am not aware of what I am seeing as a colour.

It must be emphasized again that Merleau-Ponty does not seek to do away with science, or with objective knowledge in general. "It is rather a question of understanding the scope and meaning of science"⁴⁵ Remember that Merleau-Ponty recognizes an internal tension in thought. Though objective thought depends on pre-objective experience, it also acquires a measure of independence in being the explicit belief or set of beliefs of a cognitive subject. And by considering only explicit, reflective expressions of meaning, the subject forgets the constantly present source of a belief's meaning. Objective "thought...causes us to lose contact with perceptual experience, of which it is nevertheless the outcome and the natural sequel"⁴⁶ And in forgetting its meaning origin, we come to take what is only a method of cognition, in the case of science, for the true description of reality.⁴⁷ Scientific objectivity supplants experience. And the analysis of scientific knowledge within the context of its statements leads to criteria of epistemic adequacy which are internal to those statements, or criteria which are dictated by what those statements assert about reality. We may cite Schlick here for an apt description of those who commit this error (though he would be included amongst those who make such a mistake).

[I]ts advocates are theoretically minded men who take their stand within science. Science is a system of propositions; and - without being aware of it - these thinkers substitute science for reality; for them facts are not acknowledged before they are formulated in propositions and taken down in their notebooks. But Science is not the World. The universe of discourse is not the whole universe. It is a typical rationalistic attitude which shows itself here under the guise of the most subtle distinctions.⁴⁸

We have now seen that this rationalism is misguided, for objective empirical knowledge never leaves experience behind. If it were to succeed in doing so, then it would cease to be knowledge of anything.⁴⁹

But neither can experience be severed from such knowledge, and nor can phenomenology, as a philosophy of experience, ignore science, for they share a common object, viz., pre-objective experience.⁵⁰ There is what Merleau-Ponty

calls, a reciprocal envelopment between phenomenology and science⁵¹ Science provides phenomenology with a wealth of descriptions of experience, whereas phenomenology constantly indicates the pre-objective roots of this knowledge. Merleau-Ponty admits that philosophy and science emerged with the questioning of experience, and that the phenomenology of experience could never have been at the origin of the development of reflective thought.⁵² But this is because phenomenology presupposes the development of knowledge. And what we have learned with this development is that knowledge, in trying to overcome experience, never completely left it behind, and that many of its internal difficulties arise from forgetting its empirical origins. It is now the task of philosophy to reveal this ever present ground. Phenomenology "measures the distance between our experience and...science"⁵³ It should not oppose to science a particular body of knowledge, to challenge science's abstract objectivism, but instead disclose a more integral experience, of which science is a part.⁵⁴ For this reason, Merleau-Ponty rejects Heidegger's ontological difference, which sets an independent study of the ontological over against the ontic sciences. This fails to recognize the profound limits on the power of philosophical reflection, and ignores the fact that the sciences permeate the "ontological", i.e., the sphere of original meanings of the ontic.⁵⁵ The Fundierung relation reveals a mutual dependence between philosophy and science. And Merleau-Ponty's own philosophy is a testimony to the possible fruitfulness of investigating this relationship.

VII

Before passing on to deal with the remaining difficulties facing a phenomenology of pre-objective experience, I would like to add to our understanding of this experience by briefly going over some of its features, as described by Merleau-Ponty.

Our experience of objects is always perspectival. Though the meaning of what we see actually goes beyond what is immediately given, we always only directly experience facets of objects. This perspectivism, for Merleau-Ponty, as the source of the indeterminacy of experience, implying as it does an indefinite internal and external horizon, is not a subjective deformation⁵⁶ It is, on the contrary, essential to the experience of a thing, for it "is precisely because of it that the perceived possesses in itself a hidden and inexhaustible richness, that it is a 'thing'."⁵⁷ The perspectivism makes of the object something other, something transcendent to the subject. Without it, reality would collapse into subjectivity, and we would not experience anything.

A perception which would be coextensive with sensible things is inconceivable; and it is not physically but logically that it is impossible. For there to be perception, that is, apprehension of an existence, it is absolutely necessary that the object not be completely given to the look which rests on it, that aspects intended but not possessed in the present perception be kept in reserve. A seeing which would not take place from a certain point of view and which would give us, for example, all the sides of a cube at once is a pure contradiction in terms; for, in order to be visible all together, the sides of a wooden cube would have to be transparent, that is, would cease to be the sides of a wooden cube.⁵⁸

The failing of intellectualism, which believes that the thinking subject can absorb without remainder its object of consciousness, or, in other words, that being can be equated with knowledge⁵⁹ is that it cannot account for the transcendence of the empirical world (the coherentist's "presence"), and consciousness's own experience as finite, i.e., as perspectival⁶⁰ Perspectivism, instead of being an obstacle to seeing an object (as it really is), is the means whereby we have access to it, because it is the condition of its experienceability,⁶¹ a condition that a god could not violate, insofar as it experiences transcendent entities⁶²

Though what is directly experienced are only facets of a thing, the facets are not a kind of premise, an appearance, from which the reality of the empirical object is inferred. A facet, as a sign for an object,

is never experienced independently of the meaning of the object, which is to say that an object and its sign are co-given, because the horizontality of the facet is intrinsic to its meaning.⁶³ In the absence of this horizontality, one would experience nothing. An empirical object is a unity of matter and form, or, as Merleau-Ponty sometimes expresses it, an object presents a style.⁶⁴ The meaning of an object is found in each aspect of what is experienced. It is not something behind the appearances, but that which stylistically orders each appearance.⁶⁵ This order cannot be determined a priori, as Husserl argued, because there is no finite set of characteristics which organize the infinite horizontality of what we see. "The perceived thing is not an ideal unity in the possession of the intellect, like a geometrical notion, for example; it is rather a totality open to a horizon of an indefinite number of perspectival views which blend with one another according to a given style, which defines the object in question."⁶⁶

We therefore experience an object only insofar as the object and its horizon form a system, an open system, of internally related dimensions.⁶⁷ Experience thus involves both an immanence and a transcendence, a presence and an absence; the immanence of that which is directly experienced, and the transcendence of the horizontality of the experience. The perceived thing contains a paradox, for it exists only for a perceiver, but it is never completely given to the perceiver.⁶⁸ It is this paradox which renders experience indeterminate, or ambiguous.

The paradox of the empirical world is equally the paradox of the omnipresence of consciousness and its concurrent situatedness in a particular perspective.⁶⁹ The objects that are encountered in the phenomenal field, for Merleau-Ponty, are not objects for a constituting subjectivity, for an epistemological subject, but for a situated bodily subject. The body must not be subsequently understood as an object of consciousness. It is, rather, the lived "vehicle" for an individual human life. One does not experience one's body as a tool

by which to mediate the subject's relations with the world. One is one's body, in that one lives in the world as an incarnate subject.⁷⁰

In addition, the body, analogously with the horizon of the perceptual figure, is a structured, meaningful form, which organizes our relationship to the world. The body operates as an attitude towards certain existing or possible, experiences and tasks;⁷¹ an anonymous attitude which is linked to the horizontality of the objects of experience, and which performs a kind of physiognomic perception that arranges around the subject an external empirical world, independently of the subject's conscious intentions.⁷² As was the case with the object pole of experience, so also with the subject pole, there is an underlying horizontality which goes beyond any single-grasp of consciousness. Bodily subjectivity manifests an internal and external horizon within the subject. And this horizon has many of the same features as that of empirical objects, viz., space, time, history, culture, language, and so on. All of these factors shape our experience and understanding of our body. As common to both the body and the empirical objects of experience, these horizontal dimensions play a role in the meaningfulness of both. My perception of an object is integrated into the horizon of an object, thus determining, to a large extent, what I see. But that horizon is in like manner a part of my horizon, as that in which I find myself and that which I am, therefore limiting the conscious subject relativity of the meaning of my experiences. In this manner, both the meaning of the object of experience and of the bodily subject have a common background horizon. This, according to Merleau-Ponty, shows that the subject-object relationship of a reflective intentional-subjectivity is rooted in a common horizontality which articulates the meaning of the two poles of the experiencing relation. And this shared background is what Merleau-Ponty terms being-in-the-world.

What this latter concept reveals, borrowing an expression from Husserl, is an operative intentionality which underlies explicit conscious intentionality.⁷³

The constancy of the world that I see and of my own body is not the product of my consciousness, as it is determined by the common horizon of both. Beneath my conscious intentionality, lies that of my body, which is the original intentionality of pre-objective experience.⁷⁴ The body functions as a kind of schematism, in the Kantian sense, mediating between our reflective cognitions and the pre-objective phenomenal field.⁷⁵ Contrary to Kant, however, this schematism is bodily, for it is the body which determines, in part, how empirical objects appear to us.

As anonymous, bodily intentionality operates "below" personal existence, almost like an impersonal mechanism. It is something that we are born into and something that we act through. This "impersonal existence" is precisely pre-objective experience, which Merleau-Ponty also refers to as pre-personal experience. The pre-personal existence of bodily intentionality constitutes a system with the horizontality of empirical objects, making possible the conscious experience of individual entities. The pre-personal nature of pre-objective experience helps to explain how empirical objects appear as transcendent, for the perspectival phenomenal field within which one experiences things, is formed by the body's relationship to the field, and is thus not a product of consciousness. Also, it further elucidates the Fundierung relation, as pre-personal, pre-objective experience can be inherently meaningful, without thereby being, again, a conscious creation.

The system, formed by the horizontality of the body and of empirical objects, is temporal. Consequently, it is never a closed system. And as the underlying unity of the subject-object distinction, it is a unity which must be forever reconstituted anew.⁷⁶ Time, for Merleau-Ponty, may be designated the basic measure of reality. It is the ultimate framework for the many aspects of pre-objective experience. Time is comprised of the three dimensions of past, present, and future, neither of which can be reduced to the other, but each of which is implicated in the other.⁷⁷ The significance of the present,

and that which is given in it, extends into the indefinite horizons of both the past and the future, giving time an ek-static structure. This structure makes possible the paradox of immanence and transcendence in perception. The identity of an object is transient because of the passage of time.⁷⁸ Time is always adding other meanings to reality, which are incorporated into the horizontality of pre-objective experience, altering that horizon, and thus changing the meaning of what is experienced. Yet the passage of time through the present also allows for a temporary identity of the object; an identity which, though not permanent, does not cease to be, because each moment of time posits an existence against which the other moments are powerless.⁷⁹ This movement of identity and difference, of the immediately present facet of an empirical object and its horizon (which is paralleled in the experience of the body) is intrinsic to all experience. And this paradox is not a fatal contradiction if one sees that it is grounded in time, which is precisely the passing away of the present, to be substituted by ever new presents, with the pasts forming a part of the horizon of experience.⁸⁰

The description of Merleau-Ponty's understanding of pre-objective experience has perhaps been overlong, but it will play an important role in the succeeding discussion. And from the point of view of scholarly exegesis, it is no doubt far too cursory. But as was said in the introduction to this essay, our interest in Merleau-Ponty is prompted by the belief that his philosophy enables us to deal effectively with certain problems. And his thought is interpreted in this light. We now have some comprehension of the nature of pre-objective experience, and what Merleau-Ponty means by the primacy of perception. It is apparent that by "perception" he intends a great deal more than what this term has traditionally signified. The account of this central thesis in Merleau-Ponty's thought has brought much to light, and has far reaching implications. One of which is "that the theory of knowledge has to be begun all over again"⁸¹

Chapter Four

A "Theory" of Epistemic Evaluation

One word more about giving instruction as to what the world ought to be. Philosophy in any case always comes on the scene too late to give it. As the thought of the world, it appears only when actuality is already there cut and dried after its process of formation has been completed.

G.W.F. Hegel, Philosophy of Right

I

The preceding chapter presented an argument to show that neither the epistemic status nor the meaning of objective knowledge is self-sufficient, that both are rooted in pre-objective experience. We must now consider the other major problem posed in this essay, viz., that of how phenomenological descriptions are epistemically evaluated. In the "Introduction", we saw that phenomenology, contrary to the claims of some, does not ignore the traditional problem of knowledge. It is, however, in the case of Husserl, dealt with at a different level. He begins by suspending the natural attitude, which holds apart the subject and object as two ontologically distinct kinds of entities, and then seeks to grasp the meaning of objectivity, i.e., how the objective meaning of a phenomenon is constituted in the intentional relation between a subject and its object of consciousness. The problem of knowledge is not thereby left behind, because the study of the meaning of phenomena reveals the essential structures of the knowledge relation; pure, a priori essences, which can in turn serve as the apodictically evident

norms for evaluating knowledge claims. Husserl's theory of eidetic intuition is what warrants phenomenology's contention to being a science. The essences of phenomena and subsequently the norms of knowledge are justified, for they are self-evident. And they then function as standards for evaluating non-essential knowledge.

As was pointed out, any phenomenology which rejects Husserl's theory of intuition loses its epistemic ground, and accordingly, can become suspect. Merleau-Ponty's is one such phenomenology. And our own descriptions made no appeal to such a theory. But then what is the epistemic standing of descriptions of pre-objective experience? How are they to be appraised? Those who would assert that Merleau-Ponty and phenomenology in general are not concerned with this issue leave themselves open to the criticism that phenomenology is nothing more than philosophical literature, edifying perhaps, but of little substance. I do not believe that this is what Merleau-Ponty desired, nor what phenomenology should become. What must therefore be developed is a theory of epistemic justification compatible with the analysis of pre-objective experience. And we will begin by examining why Husserl's own theory cannot work.

II

It was seen that, according to Husserl, the essential structure of consciousness's intentional relation to its object is only discerned after an epoché or reduction, which puts out of issue theoretical presuppositions about our experience and concerns with the ontological status of the subject and object in such a relation. What is thus disclosed is the immanent phenomenal field of transcendental subjectivity, i.e., the sphere of the absolutely self-given essences of phenomena. The natural world, as the object of the natural attitude, does not thereby cease to exist. One simply refrains from making

judgments that concern spatio-temporal existence? The natural world is, so to speak, "disconnected" from our epistemic commitments?

A constant theme running throughout Husserl's writings is that phenomenology must be a rigorous science, the most rigorous of all, because it purports to ground all the other sciences. To meet this demand, phenomenological investigations of the phenomena immanent to consciousness must be completely free of all presuppositions³ A presupposition being any belief or experience the object of which is not completely self-given⁴ Recall that for Husserl, self-evidence is a structural relation between consciousness and its object which "excludes Otherness" in the object, i.e., the object is fully apprehended⁵ Imperfect evidence, on the other hand, is characterized by incompleteness in the object. The meaning intention of consciousness rests expectant to other facets of the thing⁶

Without the epoché, consciousness remains unfree of the natural attitude and its commitments to transcendence (a transcendence which is both genuine and non-genuine). The latter is always given perspectively, and thus encompasses all non-essential knowledge, such as that provided by experience. The epoché is therefore essential to the scientific nature of phenomenology.

[P]henomenological reduction is the method for effecting purification of the phenomenological field of consciousness from all obtrusions from Objective [transcendent] actualities and for keeping ~~it~~ pure of them...What remains to us is the totality of the phenomena of the world, phenomena which are grasped by reflection as they are absolutely in themselves.⁷

The question is whether such obtrusions can be completely excluded. In other words, whether phenomenological investigations can be completely presuppositionless. Our own descriptions of experience and Merleau-Ponty's, showing how experience is meaningful, and how it is intrinsic to the significance of explicit predicative knowledge, which would include a knowledge of essences, suggests that this is impossible, for the simple reason that the meaning of any judgment involves the indeterminate horizon of pre-objective experience. The horizon cannot be fully grasped, as Husserl grants, but equally it cannot

be excluded from the meaning of a judgment, contrary to Husserl, except at the price of abstraction, which even then does not leave behind pre-objective experience altogether. There is therefore no object or meaning which can be completely self-given. The only thing that could conceivably be an exception to this is the horizontality of an object or statement taken in its entirety. But this is ruled by the fact that the system is never closed, given the passage of time. And insofar as all apprehended meaning involves horizontality, this "absolute" grasp would itself require a horizon. There can be then no absolute knowledge which excludes all "otherness".

Husserl's own work began to reveal difficulties for the idea of presuppositionlessness, though admittedly, he never abandoned it. In the Cartesian Meditations, he distinguishes between the active and passive genesis of meaning⁸; a distinction based on whether the judging activity of consciousness is the source of meaning. Active genesis involves the explicit formulating of judgments, thus giving origin to new meanings. Judgments, however, are always made about things; things which are already given to a subject, passively⁹. Anything constituted actively presupposes passive givens. The latter are in turn divided between objects which, though passively grasped, reflect past conscious activity, and natural entities which are completely free of human activity, i.e., devoid of "spiritual" or "cultural" characteristics!¹⁰ Husserl states that these "natural" objects are always present in our experience, regardless of how much they have been altered by the activity of consciousness!¹¹ And phenomenology, as the study of the origins of meaning, must return to these most basic passive givens, to discern their essential principles!¹² This task would be made impossible if access to these givens was always conditioned by previous conscious activity. Phenomenology could not thus be an eidetic science. But from our examination of pre-objective experience, one may say that the effort to grasp such an experience's "natural" components is futile. Our access to experience is always mediated by past conscious

activity, cognitive or otherwise. What the Fundierung relation shows is that there can be no descriptively or conceptually neutral characterization of experience, and therefore none free of "spiritual" features.

Husserl was very much aware of the difficulties confronting his genetic phenomenology. With his increasing recognition of the importance of history, he came to accept that the world we experience is always permeated by the actions of consciousness, that a sediment forms over it, like a garb of ideas, becoming an integral part of the significance of the empirical world.¹³ Yet Husserl never gave up the belief that one could get at pure experience, free of all historical sedimentation. The study of the life-world, for him, was still a way of approaching the essential structures of transcendental subjectivity.¹⁵ But with the ever expanding complexity of the presuppositions influencing consciousness's awareness, even more is required of the epochē. The opening up of the life-world to our scrutiny now involves the bracketing of history, so that one may return to the experiential origins of all meaning.¹⁶ Husserl's project is ambitious, the fruits of his labour impressive, but the end is unattainable.

If the life-world is recognized as essentially historical, then so too is our experience. And given all that has been said, it is impossible for us to somehow remove ourselves from history!¹⁷ To argue that the life-world is antecedent to history, and history's foundation, is to paradoxically characterize it, as one commentator has aptly noted, as a world in which none of us live!¹⁸ For Merleau-Ponty, the most important lesson that is learned from Husserl's striving for a presuppositionless philosophy by means of his reduction, is the impossibility of a complete reduction.¹⁹

If we were absolute mind, the reduction would present no problem. But since, on the contrary, we are in the world, since indeed our reflections are carried out in the temporal flux on to which we are trying to seize...there is no thought which embraces all our thought.²⁰

Phenomenology may still be described as a study of essences, but it is "a philosophy which puts essences back into existence",²¹ in the sense

that any cognized universality is internal to the horizon of particulars. However, lacking access to a priori essences, phenomenology also loses its epistemic ground. And the loss of Husserl's theory of evidence demands that an alternative be considered.

III

Let us begin with Merleau-Ponty's account of perceptual illusion and hallucination. He maintains that if illusion is to be possible, then the apparent and the real must remain indeterminate in both the object and the subject.²² Yet the fact that one speaks of illusion presumes the possession of truth.²³ That is, the identity of a perception as illusory assumes that one has another perception which disconfirms the former, and which is taken to be correct. But since experience is always indeterminate, the possibility of error is always present.

Illusions and hallucinations, though, are not experienced as such. Instead, they come to take on the value of reality by masking the full horizontality of an experience. Which is only possible, according to Merleau-Ponty, if delusive and normal experiences are the expression of a single basic function, viz., the pre-personal bodily relationship to the horizon of the empirical world.²⁴ One perceives correctly when the body has a precise hold on an object, when the object appears distinctly against a background, related to a bodily intentionality. But this apprehension is never all embracing, because an empirical object is always open to further perceptions.²⁵ And it is this openness to further empirical explorations which is not present in illusions, and for this reason, they are not strictly perceived, as they are perceptual abstractions. Yet because of this openness in experience, illusions are equally capable of supplanting ~~an~~ experience of particular entities. The relative closedness and openness of pre-objective experience,

or its immanence and transcendence, is what makes possible both veridical and illusory experience.

We grasp the horizontality of our experience through what is immediately given, while the latter is significant only within the context of its horizon. And we perceive correctly when the horizon of what is perceived is clarified to a sufficient degree, relative to our perceptual-cognitive interests. But because there is no clear line demarcating the degree to which a horizon needs to be brought to attention, illusion may intrude. And it occurs when we take what we perceive as true, relative to our interests, when the perception is only an incomplete one, again relative to those same interests. Consider the following example. I am walking along a sunken path in the woods, hopping from stone to stone to increase my pace. My principal interest is to arrive at my destination as soon as possible, and thus to travel this path quickly. The time between my perception of a stone and my step on to it is momentary. At one point, what I take to be a stone proves, upon my taking a step, to be nothing more than a patch of sunlight. In this case, the degree to which I attended to the horizon of my experience, which was dictated by my interest to navigate the path, becomes a cause for illusion. My perceptions, though generally correct, fail me in this one instance, because even though my perceptual interest remained the same, I failed to take into account the wider horizon of what I saw, which could have perhaps prevented my error. The horizontality of the experience is thus both the occasion for correct and false perceptions, given its essential indeterminacy.²⁶

In experience, we assume the concordance of what has so far appeared, to hold for further experiences. I assume, before taking each step, that my experience, in walking, will confirm my initial perceptions. Experiencing is what Merleau-Ponty calls putting one's faith in the world and in the future, neither of which is guaranteed by our immediate, present experiences.²⁷ But because of the internal constancy of the phenomenal field, assured by

its horizontality, our adherence to the world always allows for the correcting of experience?²⁸ In the moment of illusion, the possibility of emendation is also present, because illusions, as experiences, presuppose the horizontality of phenomena which can revise our experience. And in thus being open to rectification, we are never severed from empirical veracity.²⁹ For the same reason, we are not immune to error, since the empirical world never necessitates one particular appearance over another.³⁰

An important thing to note here is that the correcting of experience makes no reflective appeal to criteria, because the correction occurs in the experience itself, i.e., the givenness of an empirical object, and its "verification" as true, are one and the same. Because of the operative, general constancy at the pre-personal level, our experience is a self-correcting process based on the primordial faith or opinion in the world.³¹ We take each experience to be true; a truth which is falsified only when another experience replaces it, in turn, as true.³² In other words, a perception is only called into question by a truer one which is capable of substituting it.³³

The rectification of experience, for Merleau-Ponty, shares a feature with Schlick's account of the verification of empirical knowledge, and with coherentism, viz., that all see verification as something that comes at the end of a knowledge acquisition process, so that the identification of an experience as delusive or a belief as false presupposes that one already has access to the truth of the matter at issue. And as was the case with coherentism, the vantage point from which error is identified is a more complete experience or knowledge. But for Merleau-Ponty, and contrary to coherentism, inasmuch as our experience is not challenged or contradicted by other experiences, we assume it to be true without verification. There is no need to reflect on a wider experience to determine whether what is presently experienced is veridical. An appeal to a wider horizon is made

only when the original experience founders³⁴ But the "verification" here is not an explicitly conscious process, for it takes place at the pre-personal level. No great reflection is required to realize that where I have stepped, there is no stone. I correct my perception, and quickly move on. At no point do I contemplate what is before me, measuring the disparity between my original perception and what I now experience. My perception is corrected, and I appropriately alter my body's steps.

There are a great many similarities between Merleau-Ponty's description of perceptual veracity and coherence theories of epistemic justification, with the crucial difference being that for Merleau-Ponty, perceptual emendation is pre-personal, whereas for coherentism, the appraisal of beliefs is conscious. Nevertheless, for both, the criterion of evaluation, or that which corrects the experience, in the case of Merleau-Ponty, is internal to what is being revised. No reference is made to an external reality. Also, error is understood as the result of an abstraction being taken as complete. And accordingly, the difference between truth and error is a matter of degree. A falsity is equally a truth relative to the limited context in which it is asserted or experienced. And once something is disconfirmed, it is not thereby abandoned or lost. Rather, what is illusory is integrated into a wider whole. What Hegel says of philosophy holds correspondingly for experience.

It is the process which begets and traverses its own movements, and this whole movement constitutes what is positive [in it] and its truth. This truth therefore includes the negative also, what would be called the false, if it could be regarded as something from which one might abstract. The evanescent itself must, on the contrary, be regarded as essential, not as something fixed, cut off from the True, and left lying who knows where outside it, any more than the True is to be regarded as something on the other side, positive and dead.³⁵

And according to Merleau-Ponty, and as is at least the same with Hegel (though this will be questioned in the next chapter), the distinction between truth and falsity is outside all formal criterial evaluation, for experience is self-correcting. One does not reject what is illusory because it violates

a universal norm of empirical correctness, but because it is illusory relative to the specific context of an experience.

Experience is animated by a "logic" which assigns to each object its determinate features in virtue of those of the rest, and cancels out all stray data;³⁶ a "logic" which is sustained by our faithful certainty in the world.³⁷ Hence one may say that prior to the appraisal of explicit judgments, there exists an "ante-predicative knowledge"³⁸ or "lived knowledge",³⁹ which is pre-personal, pre-objective experience accepted as true. In other words, being-in-the-world is indistinguishable from being-in-truth.⁴⁰ This latter, however, is not absolute because our experience is always open to further disclosures. Consequently, if the evidence that is invoked, to justify knowledge claims, is pre-objective experience, as was argued in the last chapter, then our knowledge can at no time be absolutely certain. One may assume that such certainty is attainable, but only at the price of delusive abstraction. This brings us to the threshold of a theory of epistemic justification for empirical knowledge.

IV

The examination of Merleau-Ponty's description of perceptual illusion has concluded with the observation that perception is self-correcting, i.e., within perception, no reference is made to anything outside it, to verify whether it is veridical. Accordingly, true perceptions and their justification refer to no explicit judgments. Experience provides an ante-predicative knowledge. Merleau-Ponty also speaks of a bodily "understanding"⁴¹ or "comprehension"⁴² However, he distinguishes between the truth of the perceptual faith of pre-objective experience and the explicitly verified truth of predicative knowledge.⁴³ The relationship between the two is something that Merleau-Ponty never worked out, but there are enough indications in his writings to give

us an outline of it.

Pre-objective experience does not give us explicitly predicative knowledge, but what Merleau-Ponty calls "presences"⁴⁴ which are the many experienced features of the world articulated by the body to world relationship. And as we saw, the meaning and verification of explicit judgments is based on pre-objective experience. "[I]n order to be able to assert a truth, the actual subject must in the first place have a world or be in the world, that is, sustain round about it a system of meanings whose reciprocities, relationships and involvements do not require to be made explicit in order to be exploited"⁴⁵ This world, though, has its own epistemic standing, in that it is given with the certainty of perceptual faith. And it is that through which individual perceptions are corrected. Therefore, before we evaluate whether a particular judgment is true or false, we already experience this distinction. There is a pre-adjudicative experience of truth, which is prior to and founds verified truth⁴⁶

It must be emphasized that the correction of experiences is not accomplished by means of formal criteria. It is the content or meaning internal to the horizon of an experience which determines its acceptability. The horizon is itself given with the certainty of faith. That is, experiential error and rectification never puts into doubt the horizon of an experience, for it is by virtue of the horizon that empirical veracity is determined. And since pre-objective experience is intrinsic to the meaning and verification of objective knowledge, pre-objective experience is as well the background for the evaluation of explicit judgments. The epistemic appraisal of empirical knowledge claims appeals to the certainty of the pre-objective world, to assure it of its truth. Hence verified predicative truth is dependent on perceptual truth, which is itself not criterially justified. In other words, a judgment is justified if it fits into the context of our experience.

The fact that pre-objective experience is itself not evaluated, being

the background for all epistemic evaluation, leads to the conclusion that the criterion of epistemic justification is itself without justification. The normative appraisal of empirical knowledge is contingently grounded. But how can what is contingent, i.e., without justification, serve as the norm for epistemic appraisal? Is this not to argue for relativism and uncertainty in knowledge? In the end, is this not scepticism?

In part, it is the case that the theory so far outlined is relativistic, in that the criterion of evaluation is our pre-predicative experience, with all of its cultural and historical variations. It has also been pointed out that the horizon of this experience is always open, because of the passage of time. But as with all relativisms, the interesting question is what knowledge is relative to. It is not to the individual, because even though pre-objective experience reflects personal idiosyncrasies, there is a meaningfulness which goes far beyond any single consciousness's creative activity, both by being the result of non-conscious individual intentions and by being inherently social. In pre-objective experience, we are immersed in a world whose significance is not of our making, as particular conscious subjects. "[T]he world ceaselessly assails and beleaguers subjectivity as waves wash round a wreck on the shore"⁴⁷ Neither is it a relativism of social groups. Granted that the idiosyncrasies, in this instance, becomes far more significant, still, insofar as one may speak of group experiences, that experience is part of a much wider horizon.

Yet is not truth time bound, given pre-objective experience's temporality? And are we not then condemned to a kind of historical relativism? Here again, the answer is a qualified yes.- A knowledge claim that was evaluated as true, may no longer be so appraised, because the criterion of knowledge, as pre-objective experience, has itself changed, thus possibly leading to a different appraisal. Merleau-Ponty himself says that "the ideas to which we recur are valid only for a period of our lives or for a period in the

history of our culture"⁴⁸ He considers the example of the Pythagorean theorem, which, though an instance of a priori knowledge, gives us an idea of what he means. The theorem is not true only for a moment. Nevertheless, the later development of knowledge, which passes into our background knowledge, may show that it has no final and unconditioned evidence, and that the fact that it appears as final is itself the consequence of a specific cultural epoch.⁴⁹ Later developments may not falsify the theorem, but they can reduce it to an abstract truth.⁵⁰ This last comment brings to mind what was said with regard to perceptual error, viz., that once an experience is seen to be false, it is not thereby cast aside. What was previously taken to be absolutely certain, is now only partially so. The same applies to predicative beliefs. As thus "sublated", our knowledge comes to be part of our experiential horizon, as a past which is part of our present. And as an element of the horizon of our experience, it is not lost, for it continues to play a role in the evaluation of presently formed judgments.

— Truth is another name for sedimentation, which is itself the presence of all presents in our own. That is to say, that even and especially for the ultimate philosophical subject, there is no objectivity which accounts for our super-objective relationship to all times, no light that shines more brightly than the living present's light.⁵¹

This is not a historical relativism in the sense that we are cut off from the past as from an incommensurable reality, and that therefore what we mean and what we hold true is confined strictly to the present. On the contrary, our judgments are themselves evaluated on the basis of the past. Yes our knowledge is historically conditioned, but not in that it holds for one epoch, and no more, but rather that the criterion of knowledge is a historically changing one, which does not leave the past behind. Our knowledge is part of a horizon, and in appraising it, we appeal to our past for normative guidance. Instead of the past being an inert mass separated from us by a gulf of unintelligibility, it is the sustenance of our present thought, the source of its meaning and the basis upon which it is evaluated.

To assert that this criterion of epistemic justification leads to relativism, because it changes over time, is to claim that we are confronted with relativism because reality changes, for pre-objective experience is our basic reality. Such a relativism I cannot deny. But I believe that no one can. To presume otherwise is to believe that one can remove oneself from reality, and then pass judgment on it. This, however, is a philosophical delusion. Predicative knowledge and its normative evaluation is not the ground of reality. The truth is the opposite.

Notwithstanding all that has been said, even if one accepts that this theory avoids the more radical forms of relativism, in what way can one still speak of knowledge, as all judgments, because of the norm by which they are evaluated, appear to be highly uncertain? The criterion of knowledge that is proposed seems to, at best, enable us to distinguish between beliefs with a low probability of truth and complete falsehoods. We are given a criterion, but one so meager that it is hardly of any worth.

In reply, one must first remark that pre-objective experience, the norm of epistemic justification, is unquestionable. Not in the sense that it is itself justified, but because it is presupposed in any sort of epistemic questioning, i.e., as the condition of all justification, it is itself without justification. Lacking this, Merleau-Ponty calls it a certainty of faith. All knowledge is founded upon contingency, an indubitable contingency, if one may speak paradoxically. A second thing to note, in parallel with perception, is that the reference to verifying evidence for a judgment only occurs when a belief breaks down, i.e., when a belief proves itself to be false, thus requiring a reflective evaluation. When unchallenged, we take our beliefs to be true. Their evaluation, though, and again following perception, is not a fully conscious process, in that we do not bring before our minds the entire pre-objective world, and then set about examining whether a particular belief is in accord with it. Beliefs are instead evaluated within the context

of specific epistemic interests. And once verified relative to those interests, a belief is accepted as justified.

Waking to the noise of falling water on my window, I assert that it is raining. Getting up to look outside, I pull the curtains open, and discover that it is a malfunctioning sprinkler spraying the window. My original belief is false, and it is quickly emended to conform with my new experience, and I take the new belief to be accordingly justified. My cognitive interest, in this example, is directed towards discovering the weather conditions. And having taken appropriate measures of verification for such beliefs, I am satisfied that my new belief is warranted. At no point do I consciously examine the entire horizon of my experience, though it nevertheless is a part of that experience, and plays an essential role in the verification of my belief. In addition, I do not question the other aspects of my horizon, nor do I doubt whether what I am seeing is actually water, or whether my perception might not be the result of hallucinations, etc., because such questions remain outside my cognitive interests and their background. The new belief I have formed may also prove to be false, but I will only discover this if the belief is disconfirmed by further experiences or other beliefs, which motivate a widening of my interests, and a concurrent widening of my apprehension of the experience's horizon. But always in such evaluation is an unquestioned interest and unexamined empirical background.

One may object that this hardly establishes the certainty of a belief, because it does not confront all of its possible defeating conditions. But this is to demand an absolute certainty for our empirical knowledge, which is inconceivable given the horizontality of our knowledge. The empirical horizon, which is part of the experience which verifies our knowledge, is indefinite, and for us to be assured that all the defeating conditions of a belief have been dealt with is an impossible task. The judgments I make about what I experience can never be established with certainty, because

judgments always take for granted more than I can know in an explicit way⁵²
If I begin to seek to verify each element of the judgment verifying empirical horizon, then I will enter upon an infinite regress of doubt, until, if I could, I arrived at the ground of all justification, which is itself unjustified, but also indubitable. (The latter possibility, however, is ruled out by the fact that one can never fully grasp the complete foundation of knowledge, i.e., any cognition always assumes a background horizon).

All judgments imply a multitude of presuppositions which determine their significance, and verify them⁵³ These presuppositions cannot be fully clarified, and to attempt to do so is to enter upon a path of doubt with no end. Any certainty about our judgment comes only from halting the process of doubt, of questioning, which is by no means arbitrary, for our questioning is determined by our cognitive interests relative to a specific context. Something can be made an evident truth only by "my giving up all attempts to make it explicit"⁵⁴ But this is an evidence that can always be disputed. Merleau-Ponty says that "certainty is doubt"⁵⁵ What he means is that certainty is always contingent or de facto, and that therefore it can always be contested. The cessation of doubt implies an end to questioning, an epistemic "commitment" to a particular context. "If there is not endless doubt, and if 'I think', it is because I plunge on into provisional thoughts and, by deeds, overcome time's discontinuity"⁵⁶

This does not thereby undermine the notion of epistemic evaluation. Within the framework of the general contingency of pre-objective experience, and the more specific context of a particular cognitive interest, there are accepted norms, which within that context have a degree of necessity. Two people are looking at an object in the distance, desiring to know what it is. One says that it is a tower, the other a rock. Given their shared interest in determining what they are seeing, there exist "agreed" upon ways of verifying these two conflicting claims. For instance, they may glance at the object with the aid of binoculars, or they can actually walk up to

the object. Whatever method is chosen, it reflects accepted norms of appraisal, given their common interest and background. Merleau-Ponty himself states that existence has no fortuitous or contingent attributes⁵⁷ But at the base of this necessity is a fundamental contingency. This may be clarified by an example from Merleau-Ponty.

Everything in man is a necessity. For example, it is no mere coincidence that the rational being is also the one who holds himself upright or has a thumb which can be brought opposite the fingers; the same manner of existing is evident in both aspects. On the other hand everything in man is contingency in the sense that this human manner of existence is not guaranteed to every human child through some essence acquired at birth, and in the sense that it must be constantly reformed in him through the hazards encountered by the objective body.⁵⁸

In the same way, the context of a particular epistemic evaluation may be contingent, but within that context, our evaluations hold with necessity. And in the case of a disagreement which is not within a common evaluative context, all that one can do is attempt to show that one's own context is more encompassing, more integral, or more inclusive than that of one's opponent, and also be open to the possibility that it is the other person's background which is wider. It is for this reason that Merleau-Ponty, in challenging science, says that his aim is not to oppose to it an alternative body of knowledge, but to indicate a more complete experience, of which science is a part.

V

Having travelled this long road, we may now briefly state a theory of epistemic justification consistent with our descriptions of experience, and which thus permits the evaluation of phenomenological descriptions, and objective empirical knowledge claims in general. A belief or set of beliefs is epistemically justified if it fits or coheres with the evaluative context (determined by the cognitive interests of the agent and the horizon which forms the background of those interests) of pre-objective experience.

What this theory suggests is a kind of foundationalist-coherentism, in that it overcomes the difficulties of both theories, while retaining what is positive to them. The immediate empirical givens, which are the ultimate evidence for epistemic evaluation in foundationalism, are theoretical myths, because all experience is mediated by the empirical horizon of the particular thing experienced. But given that this mediation is not judgmental, which was the coherentist criticism of foundationalism, the theory avoids the former's difficulty in explaining how beliefs are related to the world, for all objective knowledge is grounded in pre-objective experience. A belief is justified when it coheres not with a set of inferentially related conscious beliefs, but with the internally related elements of pre-objective experience. Knowledge therefore has a foundation, though it is one which is internal to experience. The knowledge thus evaluated is not apodictic, hence phenomenology cannot meet the demands of Husserl's eidetic investigations. But the latter has proven to be unattainable. And yet we do have a criterion which can be practically employed, or rather, one which is used, for what we have articulated is a theoretical abstract of how we actually go about evaluating beliefs. The criterion of knowledge that was just defined has a qualified formality or universality, because it is reality which actually serves as the norm for our epistemic appraisals, and as reality changes, so too does the content of the norm, and hence also what is accepted as justified knowledge, including our own definition of the criterion of knowledge. In the end, we are like the sailors of Otto Neurath's ship. But this ship is not a system of beliefs, and it is not we the sailors who reconstruct it, by changing one belief here, and another there. The ship is reality itself, and it is reality which changes, because of our activity, and independently of it.⁵⁹

VI

I would like to conclude this chapter with a discussion of something that was previously mentioned, and which will put us in a position to examine our final problem, viz., whether epistemology is possible. The issue is that raised by Chisholm about the meta-justification of our epistemic appraisals. The fact that a belief is justified is not a sufficient condition for the attribution of knowledge to a cognitive agent. The agent, in addition, must be aware of this justification, and the belief that a belief is justified must itself be justified. In the absence of this, the claim that beliefs are justified is arbitrary. This points to a serious difficulty, for if the meta-justification is impossible, then so is epistemic evaluation, and accordingly epistemology. Recent discussions of coherence theories of knowledge have been sensitive to this, and an examination of one such study will provide an outline for our own answer⁶⁰

The need for the meta-justification of beliefs is a particularly troubling problem for coherentism. According to it, the justification of beliefs is based on their coherence with a believer's overall system of beliefs. The question that occurs, however, is whether the fact that a belief coheres, and how it does so, is cognitively accessible to the believer, so that he or she is warranted in holding a particular belief to be true?⁶¹ If the coherence of beliefs is an adequate criterion for epistemic evaluation, then a person must have access to his or her total system of beliefs. It is obvious, though, that no person has such a grasp. But then can one be justified in holding a given belief to be true?⁶² In addition, and more importantly, is that this grasp must as well consist of a set of meta-beliefs which also require justification. If one then asserts that the meta-beliefs are in turn justified by virtue of their coherence with the rest of a subject's belief system, then one is moving in a circle. If the grasp of one's beliefs

depends upon the justification of the meta-beliefs, then the justification of the latter cannot depend on that of the former⁶³

The solution that is proposed is that the demand for the justification of any single belief or set of beliefs can only be raised against the background of a specific system of beliefs which one assumes to be true. But since one does not, and cannot, fully apprehend such a system, the background beliefs are referred to as the doxastic presumption of any epistemic evaluation, i.e., the system of beliefs, to which a non-specifiable belief must cohere to be true, is presumed to be true, without explicit cognitive evaluation.⁶⁴ (This may be designated "weak coherentism", in contrast with the strong coherentism that has been traditionally argued for). The entire system itself can never be put into question, because such a questioning would itself presuppose a further background of beliefs. Therefore the coherence theory of epistemic justification is based on determining whether a given belief coheres with a system of beliefs which we presume to be true, for we could never come to evaluate them all. And the doxastic presumption is precisely the meta-justification of the criterion, for while only presumably true, the belief system is available as a justifying ground for our particular appraisals, i.e., the belief that a belief is justified, is justified on the grounds of this presumption.⁶⁵

We have given reasons for not accepting a coherence theory of epistemic justification, but the above theory has obvious parallels to the position we have outlined. Pre-objective experience is the background for all epistemic appraisal. And the meta-beliefs that our beliefs are justified are based on the presumed truthfulness of pre-objective experience, which has not itself been epistemically evaluated. Nonetheless, it is assumed to be true, and indubitably so.

The world is pregiven to us, the waking, always somehow practically interested subjects, not occasionally but always and necessarily as the universal field of all actual and possible praxis, as horizon. To live is always to live-in-certainty-of-the-world.⁶⁶

Pre-objective experience has been characterized as true. However, this is not the truth of epistemic appraisal, but that associated with definitions of truth. From the standpoint of epistemic appraisal, pre-objective experience is neither true nor false; indeed, it does not provide us with knowledge, as traditionally understood. Truth, as a property of judgments, is inapplicable to pre-objective experience. Though within the latter, there is an experienced distinction between a non-criterially determined truth and falsity, upon which the truth and falsity of explicit judgments is based. Pre-objective experience is thus both the criterion of epistemic evaluation and the definition of truth. It is the coherent totality that is our world, which includes within it our predicative judgments. And again, following coherentism, there is a strong connection between the two. Coherentists have always stressed that if one separates knowledge from truth and reality, then knowledge becomes inexplicable, for there is no way to guarantee that one's justified knowledge is actually knowledge about the world⁶⁷

In identifying the criterion of knowledge with the definition of truth, we are able to resolve the traditional problem of knowledge. As was said, the concern with epistemic justification emerges with the recognition that we do not have immediate access to or contact with the world, and that therefore the question arises of whether our knowledge reflects the world as it is. What our investigations have shown is that underlying the epistemic evaluation of judgments is the unified world of pre-objective experience; an experience which involves an immediate contact between the embodied subject and the world. This contact provides the certainty of the perceptual faith in the world, in which there is no room for doubt. "[T]here is indeed one human act which at one stroke cuts through all possible doubts to stand in the full light of truth: this act is perception, in the wide sense of knowledge of existences"⁶⁸ And this perceptual faith is the ground for our epistemic appraisals. All sceptical doubt presupposes the truth of experience. Hence

any evaluation is always a "regional" affair, because one can never doubt all of experience, i.e., all that there is. The radical sceptic, who affirms that all our knowledge and experience may nevertheless be false, shares with the metaphysical realist the belief in the possibility of a world radically independent of these two modes of awareness. But the notion of a reality in-itself, given all that has been said, is unintelligible. And any assertion to the contrary is already understood within the context of our experience. Inasmuch as one can meaningfully speak of such a world, then what is said of it must be rooted in pre-objective experience, and therefore no longer be outside of it. Global scepticism is fundamentally incoherent given the conditions of explicit predicative meaning and truth.

This accordingly provides an answer to the difficulty of the infinite regress of justification. Remember that the foundationalist rejects coherentism's reply to this problem because it confines epistemic evaluation to a limited domain of our beliefs, whereas the foundationalist is concerned with what justifies knowledge as a whole. The coherentist's halting of the regress appears to be nothing more than arbitrary, thus undermining the justification of any belief. But there can be no foundation for knowledge, as conceived by foundationalism. All epistemic appraisal is limited. But it is not thereby arbitrary, because the ground of our appraisals is not something we choose, for it is determined by our cognitive interests and their background. One cannot make the same claim for coherentism, for confining epistemic evaluation solely to the domain of explicit beliefs, and thus severing all appraisal from experience, the stopping of the chain of justification cannot but be arbitrary, for it is due solely to our decision. The fact that our experience is always indeterminate is not the result of a failing on our part, but an intrinsic feature of our reality. Were it otherwise, we would not experience what we do. Yet for the coherentist, the inability to pursue the justification of one's beliefs is a practical limitation. And it is

only because we choose to terminate this pursuit, that beliefs can be justified. But this is groundless, as the foundationalist maintains. Customarily, the way coherentism has avoided this is by postulating an absolute at the base of all knowledge. In the next chapter we will have occasion to examine this argument, and show that it is unacceptable.

The Cartesian project of rejecting all that is doubtful, and beginning with self-evident certainties, is impossible, not only because there are no such certainties, but because such a method of doubt impedes the cognition of anything. Leibniz had already argued that if one adopted Descartes' hyperbolic doubt, then no scientific knowledge would be possible.⁶⁹ It is proper to examine the degree of demonstrative support that a proposition has.⁷⁰ There are, though, many occasions in which we cannot attain demonstrative certainty.⁷¹ Knowledge acquisition, however, is not thereby halted, because one may admit hypotheses, from which some secure knowledge can be derived.⁷² What we have shown is that all knowledge is thus hypothetical or conditional. The conditions are not, however, accepted axioms or propositions, as with Leibniz, but pre-objective experience, which, citing Hume, is the "great subverter of Pyrrhonism".⁷³

The certainty in the world of perceptual faith does not subsequently make us immune to error, as some have argued,⁷⁴ because the horizontality of experience is always beyond our immediate grasp, though it is nonetheless intrinsic to the meaning of what is experienced. The element of uncertainty in experience, due to its horizontality, makes possible experiential error, without the need of invoking the realist's independent reality, for the transcendent in experience is not divorced from the immanent. The assertion that the problem of knowledge cannot be overcome assumes that reality as such is doubtful, and that epistemology must first guarantee our knowledge and experience of reality, before we can be certain of its existence. But such an undertaking is inachievable and delusive. Philosophy cannot justify

reality as a whole, nor the entirety of our knowledge of it, for all questions of justification presuppose the certainty of our experience of reality.

The grand philosophical project is the creation of a philosopher's dream, from which we, as philosophers, can awaken.

When he awakens from his dream, he will be the first to join in the laugh against himself, and to confess, that all his objections are mere amusement, and can have no other tendency than to show the whimsical condition of mankind, who must act and reason and believe; though they are not able, by their most diligent inquiry, to satisfy themselves concerning the foundations of these operations.⁷⁵

Chapter Five

The Limits of Epistemic Reason

The phenomenologists have plunged man back into the world; they have given full measure to man's agonies and sufferings, and also to his rebellions.

Jean-Paul Sartre, The Transcendence of the Ego

I

Having sketched a theory of epistemic justification, we may now turn to the question of whether epistemology is itself possible. In the closing of the first chapter, an apparent circularity in epistemology was discerned. As Chisholm characterized it, epistemology appears to be trapped, before engaging in the study of knowledge, into assuming either particular instances of knowledge or the criterion of knowledge. In either case, it begs the question. Therefore, epistemology qua a presuppositionless examination of knowledge, which is how it has traditionally been conceived, appears to be impossible.

II

Chisholm himself proposes a solution to this problem, which he terms "critical cognitism"! One begins by postulating, following traditional epistemology, four sources of knowledge: external perception, memory, self-awareness, reason. These sources provide us with direct or indirect knowledge

of the world. Chisholm seeks to avoid the above dilemma by arguing that in commencing the study of knowledge with its sources, one neither assumes instances of it, nor its criterion. But this only seems to take the problem back a step, for what grounds do we have for accepting a source of knowledge as warranted? Instead of the former assumptions, we have a new one. Hence Chisholm fails in securing epistemology from the charge of circularity?

III

Hegel also identified this conundrum in the theory of knowledge, and proposed a solution. In criticizing Kantian critical philosophy, Hegel noted that any examination of knowledge presupposes a criterion, by means of which knowledge is identified. This, however, is unacceptable, if epistemology is to be presuppositionless. But, according to Hegel, in the case of the investigation of knowledge as such, in which it becomes an object of reflection, this difficulty is overcome. Consciousness both distinguishes and relates itself, at the same time, to that which it is consciousness of. The relating of consciousness, or the being of something for consciousness, is knowing. The being-for-another of the object of consciousness is distinguished from the being-in-itself of the object, which lies outside of the knowing relationship.³ This "being-in-itself is called truth"⁴ The inquiry into the truth of knowledge is therefore an inquiry into its being-in-itself. But knowledge is an object that exists for us, hence what "we asserted to be its essence would be not so much its truth but rather just our knowledge of it"⁵ i.e., what we affirm to hold for knowledge, does not hold objectively.

Knowledge of an object and its truth are distinct. However, with knowledge as an object, both the being-for-another and the being-in-itself of knowledge fall within consciousness, because knowledge, as the relation of consciousness to an object, is not external to consciousness. Consequently, as an object

of study, it can be known without the risk of scepticism. In epistemology, consciousness "provides its own criterion from within itself, so that the investigation becomes a comparison of consciousness with itself"⁶ The consciousness of knowledge and the truth of knowledge both exist for consciousness, thus the examination of knowledge is possible for it involves the comparison of these two elements, which pertain to one and the same thing⁷ In this comparison, if the two do not correspond, then the object of the knowing relation and its truth or criterion change, with a new object evolving, which demands a new criterion⁸ The continuous endeavour to achieve a correspondence between the being-for-another and the being-in-itself of knowledge provides an immanent standard for the truth of knowledge. And in the search for congruence, an internal dialectic develops within consciousness, which leads it from one state of knowledge to another. Therefore, rather than presupposing instances of knowledge or a criterion, Hegel assumes that both are co-given. In other words, one does not approach knowledge as an already given object, nor with a pre-established norm. Instead, one begins by accepting a knowledge claim, and then seeing whether this claim meets its own standards of adequacy. The dilemma is thus dissolved by seeing the two alternatives, not as mutually exclusive opposites, but as complementary aspects of any epistemology.

There is a similarity here between our previous statement that the criterion of knowledge and the definition of truth are identified in pre-objective experience, and Hegel's affirmation that the object of knowledge and its criterion are co-given. In either case, whether a knowledge claim satisfies its criterion is an internal matter. And if it fails to do so, it is not thereby rejected, for what it ~~fails~~ to meet is not a formal criterion, but a more inclusive vantage point, of which it becomes a part, thus generating a new object of scrutiny and a corresponding norm of correctness. Yet if one attends to Hegel's solution closely, one will see that there is a profound difference between it, and the theory we have proposed. The criterion by

which a knowledge claim or state of consciousness is evaluated, for Hegel, is not internal to the particular state of consciousness, in the sense that a claim is evaluated strictly in terms of its own principles, for the criterion of appraisal is the correspondence of the for-itself and the in-itself. That is, a belief is accepted on the basis of whether it completely grasps that which it purports to be about. But this is to impose upon beliefs a condition which is perhaps incapable of being met. Which is to say that it begs the question of what knowledge must be. The object of knowledge and its criterion are described in ideal terms; terms which can only be satisfied by absolute knowledge, which Hegel accepts at the end of his discussion on the problem of criteria?⁹

Consciousness, in its first claims to knowledge, contains the two moments of knowing and the object of knowledge!¹⁰ This opposition provides the driving force of Hegel's dialectic, and is the basis for his understanding of finitude, which is defined as the disparity between an object and its concept!¹¹ The dialectic concludes when these two moments coincide in absolute knowledge or Spirit, which is at the same time an overcoming of what is finite!¹² This is not a unity which collapses the distinction between knowledge and its object, but the distinction is made within knowledge. The object, though distinct from the knowing relation, is known in its fundamental categorical structure, which is a reflection of consciousness. Hegel's absolute knowledge is not a cognition of every property of all the particular entities in the world, but rather the apprehension of all the determinate structures of particularity, which are the conditions of the possibility for particularity. The absolute is "the ground and soil of...knowledge in general"!¹³ And once attained, all the essential structures of reality are manifest to consciousness or Spirit.

In this element the moments of Spirit now spread themselves out in that form of simplicity which knows its object as its own self. They no longer fall apart into the antithesis of being and knowing, but remain in the simple oneness of knowing; they are the True in

the form of the True, and their difference is only the difference of content.¹⁴

But from what we have discerned in our own investigations of the conditions of knowledge, it would appear to follow that Hegel's absolute is unattainable. Even if one grants that absolute knowledge is a knowledge of categories, it still remains unacceptable, because all conceptual knowledge of empirical reality is grounded in pre-objective experience and the latter can never be fully grasped, either empirically or categorically. For Hegel, true knowledge is knowledge of the infinite;¹⁵ a knowledge which apprehends the full meaning of objectivity as a reflection of the knowing subject's (Spirit's) own essential structure.

The aim of knowledge is to divest the objective world that stands opposed to us of its strangeness, and, as the phrase is, to find ourselves at home in it: which means no more than to trace the objective world back to the notion - to our innermost self.¹⁶

As we saw with Husserl, however, the belief that thought can overcome the "otherness" of objective reality is false. Indeed, mention of Husserl brings to attention some parallels between the two philosophers. Specifically, each maintains that philosophy should be presuppositionless, and they both believe reason capable of such a task.¹⁷ We have seen this to be impossible. According to Merleau-Ponty, absolute mind and the world as a determinate reality are rationalizations of our immediate, pre-objective experience.¹⁸ Hegel, by setting the object of knowledge and the criterion of knowledge within consciousness, not only predetermines the outcome of the dialectic, but also assumes that this is an appropriate standard for knowledge, i.e., that reality's essential structures can be fully known by consciousness. This cannot however, simply be presupposed. The analogous unity of consciousness and its object, in pre-objective experience, does not suffer from the same flaw, because it is both the criterion and content of knowledge.

IV

Hegel's solution to the dilemma facing epistemology fails because though he posits the unity of the object of knowledge and its criterion, he does so only at the level of explicit predicative thought, thus reducing the unity to an abstract norm, against which concrete forms of consciousness are evaluated. Contrary to this, we have argued that this unity is present at the level of pre-objective experience. As such, it is not a unity which can be captured in a formal principle. It is a criterion of knowledge which is relative to the content of that experience. What is judged to be coherent with experience depends upon the content of the experience which serves as the context for epistemic evaluation. The dilemma, which poses a choice between instances of knowledge and criteria of epistemic justification, is false, as Hegel saw. But it is overcome by realizing that the study of knowledge is itself grounded in a more fundamental domain of human life, and not by positing an absolute as knowledge's foundation. The dilemma only proves to be a dilemma insofar as one accepts the contention that epistemology should be without presuppositions. Once this is acknowledged to be impossible, one may begin to see how epistemic evaluation is in fact carried out.

Habermas states, as was noted, that Hegel's critique of epistemology demonstrates that it can never play the role of first philosophy, and that it depends on something prior to it, which it takes as its object, while simultaneously originating in it. It may now be said that what is antecedent to epistemic evaluation is pre-objective experience. One may perhaps speak of an absolute in our theory, but as Jean-Paul Sartre said with regard to Merleau-Ponty, the absolute is life.¹⁹

The major epistemological difficulties facing a non-eidetic phenomenology have now been dealt with, thus completing the central tasks of this essay. Before finishing, I would like to briefly summarize our conclusions, and make a few observations about some of the implications of what has been argued for.

The theory of epistemic evaluation expounded in this paper has been characterized as a foundationalist-coherentism. No experience is given to us unmediated. But what mediates experience is the horizontality of what appears to us. And this experiential horizon forms the context of epistemic appraisal, being both the source of meaning and the criterion of objective knowledge. It should be emphasized that the pre-objective experiential background of our explicitly formulated beliefs is not a conceptual framework, as this is described in some contemporary philosophical literature²⁰ The notion of a conceptual scheme raises all the difficulties we saw in coherentism's attempt to understand the relationship between concepts and sensuous content. The whole idea has been appropriately called, by Donald Davidson, the third dogma of empiricism (following on Quine's earlier work)²¹ This dogma and its attendant difficulties are surpassed once it is seen that pre-objective experience is a unity of form and content.

This experience, as the context for epistemic evaluation, in turn, solves the problem of scepticism, or more correctly, that of global scepticism. No longer can one postulate a metaphysical reality independent of all human experience, for the meaning and verification of any such postulation depends on that experience. But concerns with epistemic justification are not subsequently made redundant, as has been argued²² We are not separated from reality through experience, but neither is reality completely given to us in experience. Our experience of the world is only of facets, though the

meaning of what immanently appears is linked to a transcendent, indeterminate horizon, which leaves room for error. One may refer here to a difference between appearance and reality, but this is not a difference in kind, as each depends upon the other for its meaning. As long as the possibility of error remains open, then questions of epistemic justification, and thus epistemology, are still legitimate. What has been shown, though, is that epistemic appraisal is not a fully reflective process, because many of the elements which play a role in epistemic evaluation are unrecognized and without justification. This is not a matter of doing away with epistemology, but of undermining its "false consciousness"²³ i.e., the Cartesian dream of a fully elucidated and evident foundation for all knowledge.

As a result, the framework within which epistemological issues are discussed must be greatly expanded. The criterion of epistemic evaluation, as pre-objective experience, obliges us to consider many things in the appraisal of a belief, which have been traditionally excluded. For one, the linguistically sedimented meaning of pre-objective experience reveals an inter-personal or inter-subjective dimension in knowledge appraisal. The criterion of knowledge and the knowledge evaluated is no longer the privileged property of a solitary cognitive agent. Coherentism has always objected to the solipsistic implications of foundationalism, stressing a social dimension to our knowledge acquisition²⁴ Our analysis only reinforces this, because the meaning of pre-objective experience is not due solely to the activity of individual subjects, as it is the consequence of past, sedimented judging activity.

The last comment also reveals a historical aspect to knowledge. The horizontality of our experience includes the sedimented history of past cognitions. As such, the history of the horizon is intrinsic to the meaning of what is experienced. And as this horizon is the criterion of epistemic evaluation, then whether a belief is justified or not depends on whether it is coherent with its own historical context.

For classical epistemology, the history of a belief, or more generally, its origin, plays no role in the belief's verification, though it is not altogether ignored. Usually, it is relegated to the context of discovery, i.e., it is included amongst the many factors that may lead someone to make the knowledge claim that he or she does, all of which though can be excluded from considerations about what justifies knowledge. But if the meaning of what is asserted about something is determined by its relationship to its background horizon, including all that this does, and if this horizon is the criterion by which a knowledge claim is evaluated, then questions of epistemic appraisal cannot dismiss a belief's context of discovery. The criticism that Merleau-Ponty has misunderstood the intellectualist account of experience, taking a normative construction of experience for a description of it, and thus collapsing the distinction between prescription and description, is misguided, because what Merleau-Ponty is trying to show is that this distinction is untenable. Knowledge of the prescriptive norms for any epistemic evaluation depends on a description of what motivates the holding of a particular belief, because the identification of the criterion of knowledge involves the description of the empirical horizon of the belief being evaluated. Epistemology can thus no longer sever itself from history, and all the many other aspects of the horizon of experience. Therefore, if epistemology is to fully comprehend all that is at work in epistemic evaluation, then it must become a descriptive phenomenology of human reality.

VI

Throughout the history of philosophy, its practitioners have sought to explain and give reasons for why the many dimensions of reality are as they are, and ultimately, to justify reality as such, thus disclosing necessity in our changing world. In examining the functioning of reason in epistemic

appraisal, the quest to provide basic foundations for knowledge has proven to be unattainable. The normative evaluations of knowledge always presuppose, and are rooted in, a life-world of pre-objective experience, which cannot in principle be fully explicated and justified. Philosophy, as paradigmatically embodied in epistemology, thus becomes, what Merleau-Ponty calls, a "dialogue of infinite mediation"²⁵, an incompletable task of trying to understand the world, and our knowledge of it²⁶.

Merleau-Ponty says that the revelation of the contingent ground of reason, demands a new idea of it²⁷. We have now seen something of what this new idea involves, specifically with regard to epistemic rationality. I have no doubt failed to deal with many of the issues that emerge throughout this essay, and in answering some questions, I have given occasion for many more. But I do believe that I have succeeded in demonstrating two things. First, that objective empirical knowledge is founded on an indeterminate, pre-objective experience, which phenomenologists have designated by the term life-world. And secondly, this has provided the grounds for a new understanding of epistemic evaluation. Epistemology is thus secured, but in the absence of any absolute norms. As Virgil could not guide Dante to Paradise, so too does Merleau-Ponty leave us in the realm of shadows; shadows which are nonetheless the source of our wisdom.

The implications of this for the understanding of reason in general, I have not pursued, though I believe that what has been said has ramifications for other areas of normative evaluation²⁸ and it indicates an alternative to the more extreme critiques of reason that are presently the fashion. We are not denied truth, but in recognizing the finitude of human existence, we can no longer reach the heights of the absolute. It does not follow that we should therefore embrace the semi-mystical insights of Heidegger, forever attending upon the call of Being, in a world uncaring for its message, nor the nihilism of post-modernism. Between these voices of despair and a return

to the philosophical dreams of the past, Merleau-Ponty presents us with the possibility of a human truth, which is the truth of our existence in the world in which we live.

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- 37-Edmund Husserl, The Crises of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology, p. 131
- 38-Henry Pietersma, "Intentionality and Epistemic Appraisal", in The Southern Journal of Philosophy, Vol. xxv, No. 3, 1987, p. 393
- 39-Edmund Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, (trans. Dorion Cairns), Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, The Hague, 1960, p. 1
- 40-Edmund Husserl, Logical Investigations-Vol. 1, p. 221
- 41-Ibid., p. 42
- 42-My brief discussion of the origin of the problem of knowledge is indebted to the following:

- Laurence Bonjour, The Structure of Empirical Knowledge, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1985, p. 7
- 43-Edmund Husserl, The Idea of Phenomenology, (trans. William P. Alston and George Nakhnikian), Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1964, p. 15
- 44-Ibid., p. 18
- 45-Ibid., p. 1
- 46-Ibid., p. 15
- 47-Edmund Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, pp. 19, 56
- 48-Edmund Husserl, The Idea of Phenomenology, pp. 25-26
- 49-Ibid., p. 27
- 50-Ibid., p. 29
- 51-Ibid., pp. 44, 49
- 52-Edmund Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, p. 81
- 53-Ibid.
- 54-Edmund Husserl, The Crises of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology, p. 189
- 55-Edmund Husserl, Logical Investigations-Vol. 1, pp. 264-265
- 56-Ibid., p. 265
- 57-Edmund Husserl, Ideas, (trans. W.R. Boyce Gibson), Collier Books, A Division of Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., New York, 1962, p. 12
- 58-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Philosopher and His Shadow", in Signs, p. 165
- 59-Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, (trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson), Harper and Row, Publishers, New York, 1962, p. 87
- 60-Ibid.
- 61-Ibid., p. 88
- 62-Ibid., p. 262
- 63-Martin Heidegger, "Letter On Humanism", (trans. Frank A. Capuzzi, J. Glenn Gray, David Farrell Krell), in David Farrell Krell (ed.), Basic Writings, Harper and Row, Publishers, New York, 1977, p. 194
- 64-Edmund Husserl, "Philosophy as Rigorous Science", in Phenomenology and the Crises of Philosophy, (trans. Quentin Lauer), Harper Torchbooks, Harper and Row Publishers, New York, 1965, p. 120
- 65-Edmund Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, p. 72
- 66-Edmund Husserl, Ideas, p. 160, sec. 59

- 67-Ibid., p. 83, sec. 24
- 68-Edmund Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, p. 57
- 69-Edmund Husserl, Logical Investigations-Vol. 2, (trans. J.N. Findlay),
Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1970, p. 765
- 70-Edmund Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, p. 72
- 71-Stephan Strasser, Phenomenology and the Human Sciences, Humanities Press,
Atlantic Highlands, N.J., 1980, p. 297
- 72-Ibid., p. 299
- 73-Henry Pietersma, "Phenomenological Remarks on Epistemic Appraisal",
(Unpublished Paper), pp. 15-16

Chapter One: The Joust of Criteria

- 1-Laurence Bonjour, The Structure of Empirical Knowledge, p. 7
- 2-Ibid., p. 16
- 3-René Descartes, "Meditations On First Philosophy", in The Philosophical Works of Descartes-Vol. 1, (trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross),
Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1931, pp. 144-145
- 4-See, for example, the following works:
Bertrand Russell, The Problems of Philosophy, Oxford University Press,
Oxford, 1967, p. 26
Alfred J. Ayer, The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge, Macmillan and
Co. Ltd., London, 1964, pp. 108-112
Anthony Quinton, The Nature of Things, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London,
1973, p. 119
Roderick M. Chisholm, Theory of Knowledge (second edition), Prentice-Hall,
Inc., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1977, p. 19
- 5-Laurence Bonjour, The Structure of Empirical Knowledge, p. 59
- 6-Moritz Schlick, "On the Foundations of Knowledge", in Oswald Hanfling (ed.),
Essential Readings In Logical Positivism, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1981,
p. 194
- 7-Bertrand Russell, An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth, Penguin Books Ltd.,
Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1973, pp. 131-132
- 8-Ibid., p. 131
- 9-Ibid., pp. 131-132
- 10-Ibid., p. 132
- 11-Ibid.

12-Ibid.

13-Ibid., p. 136

14-Ibid., p. 132

15-Alfred J. Ayer, The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge, p. 81

16-Ibid.

17-Ibid., p. 83

18-Roderick M. Chisholm, Theory of Knowledge (second edition), p. 19

19-Roderick M. Chisholm, The Foundations of Knowing, The Harvester Press Limited, Sussex, 1982, p. 10.

20-Ibid.

21-Ibid., pp. 24-26

22-Ibid.

23-Ibid., p. 25

24-Ibid., pp. 54-55

25-Moritz Schlick, "On the Foundations of Knowledge", p. 179

26-Ibid., p. 194

27-Ibid., p. 179

28-Ibid., p. 187

29-Ibid., p. 190

30-Ibid.

31-Ibid.

32-Ibid., p. 191

33-Ibid.

34-Ibid.

35-Ibid., p. 196

36-Laurence Bonjour, The Structure of Empirical Knowledge, p. 26

37-Anthony Quinton, The Nature of Things, p. 119

38-Alfred J. Ayer, The Problem of Knowledge, Penguin Books Ltd., Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1956, p. 53

39-Ibid.

- 40-Laurence Bonjour, The Structure of Empirical Knowledge, p. 69
- 41-Alfred J. Ayer, The Problem of Knowledge, p. 67
- 42-Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, (trans. Norman Kemp Smith), The Macmillan Press Ltd., London, 1933, p. 41, B1
- 43-Brand Blanshard, The Nature of Thought-Vol. 1, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1939, pp. 567-568
- 44-Ibid., p. 580
- 45-This distinction was made by Russell, the confusion of which he claimed to be the basis of Hegel's notion of identity in difference. See the following:
Bertrand Russell, Logic and Knowledge, Robert Charles Marsh (ed.), George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1957, pp. 244-245
Bertrand Russell, Our Knowledge of the External World, The New American Library, New York, 1960, p. 38, footnote 5
- 46-Michael Oakeshott, Experience And Its Modes, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1933, pp. 13-14
- 47-G.W.F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, (trans. A.V. Miller), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1977, pp. 59-61, secs. 95-99
- 48-Ibid., p. 60, sec. 96
- 49-G.W.F. Hegel, Logic, (trans. William Wallace), Oxford At The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1975, p. 38, sec. 24
- 50-Brand Blanshard, The Nature of Thought-Vol. 1, p. 96
- 51-Ibid., p. 81
- 52-Harold H. Joachim, The Nature of Truth, Oxford At The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1906, p. 25
- 53-F.H. Bradley, Essays On Truth and Reality, Oxford At The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1914, p. 204
- 54-Brand Blanshard, The Nature of Thought-Vol. 1, p. 120
- 55-F.H. Bradley, Essays On Truth and Reality, p. 108
- 56-Brand Blanshard, The Nature of Thought-Vol. 2, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1939, p. 228
- 57-Donald Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", in Ernest LePore (ed.), Truth and Interpretation, Basil Blackwell Ltd., London, Oxford, 1986, p. 310
- 58-See, for instance, the following:
F.H. Bradley, Essays On Truth and Reality, p. 223
A.C. Ewing, Idealism: A Critical Survey, Methuen and Co. Ltd., Strand, 1961, pp. 228-229
Brand Blanshard, The Nature of Thought-Vol. 2, p. 264

Laurence Bonjour, The Structure of Empirical Knowledge, p. 95

59-See, For example, the following:

Moritz Schlick, "On the Foundations of Knowledge", p. 183

Alfred J. Ayer, The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge, p. 91

The coherence theory proposed by Otto Neurath, however, does identify coherence with logical consistency, and perhaps one should see the above criticisms in the light of Neurath's position. See the following:

Otto Neurath, "Protocol Sentences", in Oswald Hanfling (ed.), Essential Readings In Logical Positivism

60-Laurence Bonjour, The Structure of Empirical Knowledge, p. 96

61-Brand Blanshard, The Nature of Thought-Vol. 2, p. 264

62-Ibid., p. 452

63-Ibid., p. 489

64-F.H. Bradley, Appearance and Reality (second edition), Oxford At The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1897, p. 169

65-Harold H. Joachim, The Nature of Truth, p. 113

66-Josiah Royce, The Basic Writings of Josiah Royce-Vol. 1, John J. McDermott (ed.), The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1969, p. 347

67-Brand Blanshard, The Nature of Thought-Vol. 2, p. 430

68-Ibid., p. 433

69-Laurence Bonjour, The Structure of Empirical Knowledge, p. 90

70-Ibid.

71-Ibid., pp. 91-92

72-F.H. Bradley, Essays On Truth and Reality, p. 211

73-Laurence Bonjour, The Structure of Empirical Knowledge, p. 108

74-Bertrand Russell, An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth, p. 140

75-Laurence Bonjour, The Structure of Empirical Knowledge, p. 107

76-See, for example, the following:

Moritz Schlick, "On the Foundations of Knowledge", pp. 184-185

Bertrand Russell, Philosophical Essays, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1966, p. 136

Alfred J. Ayer, The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge, p. 91

77-An exception to this is the following:

Jonathan Dancy, An Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, pp. 227-241

78-Ibid., p. 227

79-Roderick M. Chisholm, The Foundations of Knowing, p. 65

80-Ibid., pp. 65-66

81-Jürgen Habermas, Knowledge and Human Interests, (trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro), Beacon Press, Boston, 1971, p. 8

82-G.W.F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, p. 46, sec. 75

83-G.W.F. Hegel, Logic, p. 14, sec. 10

84-G.W.F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, p. 52, sec. 81

85-My description of Hegel's argument is a paraphrasing of Jonathan Dancy's presentation of it, as found in the following:

Jonathan Dancy, An Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology, p. 228

86-Jürgen Habermas, Knowledge and Human Interests, p. 8

87-Roderick M. Chisholm, The Foundations of Knowing, p. 61

Chapter Two: Unearthing the Roots

1- My identification of coherentism with intellectualism is not historically accurate. When replying to intellectualism, Merleau-Ponty is speaking of a school of neo-Kantian philosophy, whereas coherentism is more an outgrowth of Hegel's thought. Nevertheless, I do believe that my comparison is justified, for what Merleau-Ponty criticizes in intellectualism can be found in coherentism, and indeed, is an essential aspect of the latter, as will be shown.

2-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. 5

3-Ibid., pp. 3-4

4-Ibid., p. 14

5-Ibid., p. 6

6-Ibid., p. 16

7-Ibid., p. 4

8-Ibid., p. 8

9-Ibid., p. 21

10-Ibid., p. 25

11-Ibid., p. 26

12-Ibid., p. 27

13-Ibid.

14-Ibid., p. 30

15-Ibid., p. 29

16-Ibid., p. 32

17-Ibid., p. 34

18-For a contrast of perception and judgment, and an overall critique of judgment theories of perception, see the following:

R.J. Hirst, The Problems of Perception, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1959, pp. 219-245

19-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. 34

20-Ibid., pp. 34-35

21-Ibid., p. 35

22-Ibid.

23-Ibid.

24-Ibid., p. 39

25-Ibid., p. 45

26-Ibid., p. 31

27-Ibid., p. 49

28-Ibid.

29-Ibid., p. 31

30-Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, pp. 92-93, A50-A51, B74-B75

31-Michael Oakeshott, Experience And Its Modes, p. 52

32-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Structure of Behavior, (trans. Alden L. Fisher), Beacon Press, Boston, 1963, p. 187

33-Bernard Bosanquet, The Essentials of Logic, Macmillan and Co., Limited, London, 1895, p. 28

34-Bernard Bosanquet, Logic-Vol. 2 (second edition), Oxford University Press, London, 1911, p. 15

35-Bernard Bosanquet, The Essentials of Logic, pp. 28-29

36-F.H. Bradley, Essays On Truth and Reality, p. 108

37-Brand Blanshard, The Nature of Thought-Vol. 1, p. 118

38-Ibid.

39-Ibid.

40-Ibid.

41-G.W.F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, p. 66, sec. 110

42-Ibid., p. 60, sec. 97

G.W.F. Hegel, Logic, p. 34, sec. 21

43-G.W.F. Hegel, Logic, p. 240, sec. 175

44-Ibid.

45-G.W.F. Hegel, Science of Logic-Vol. 2, (trans. W.H. Johnston and L.G. Struthers), George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1929, p. 475

46-Brand Blanshard, The Nature of Thought-Vol. 1, p. 63

47-Michael Oakeshott, Experience And Its Modes, p. 19

48-Bernard Bosanquet, The Essentials of Logic, p. 22

49-G.W.F. Hegel, Logic, p. 275, sec. 213

50-For traditional coherentism, there is ultimately only one particular, namely, the Absolute. See the following:

-F.H. Bradley, The Principles of Logic-Vol. 2 (second edition), Oxford University Press, London, 1922, pp. 647-657

Michael Oakeshott, Experience And Its Modes, pp. 30, 45, 151

Brand Blanshard, The Nature of Thought-Vol. 1, pp. 627-651

51- The same argument would apply to Husserl's account of pre-predicative experience as an experience of particulars or individuals. In the Formal and Transcendental Logic and Experience and Judgment, Husserl attempts a genetic analysis of the origins of the meaning and evidence of predicative judgments. What is shown in this analysis is that the ultimate substrates of judgments, the ultimate entities about which judgments speak, are individuals. These are given in experience prior to all judging activity, and contain in themselves no meaning added by judgment. [Edmund Husserl, Formal and Transcendental Logic, (trans. Dorion Cairns), Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1978, p. 204] The experience of individuals, as the ground of judging activity, in turn, guarantees that judgments provide knowledge about the world. (Ibid., p. 204)

The difficulty with this project is that if the coherentist analysis of experience is correct, then one can never grasp individuals free of judgments. Experience is by nature predicative, and to speak of a pre-predicative experience is unintelligible. Therefore, Husserl's aim to elucidate a genetic phenomenology of judgments, and his more general task of grounding objective knowledge in the pre-predicative experience of the life-world, fails.

At one point in Experience and Judgment, Husserl seems to agree with the coherentist in saying that the apprehension of pre-given sensuous individuals already reflects cognitive activity, although of the lowest level. (Experience and Judgment, p. 59) He goes on to state that in passive, pre-predicative experience, one does not experience objects as such, but mere "stimuli" which proceed from an existent in the surrounding world. (Ibid., p. 60) Husserl here appears to be advocating the kind of epistemological dualism that we spoke of previously, with the addition that the sensory content of judgments is also their meaning and evidential ground, after the manner of the foundationalist's empirical givens. But the idea of sensory stimuli serving as the foundation for judgments is no more comprehensible than the idea of individual empirical objects

playing the same role, given the coherentist argument.

Perhaps this criticism of Husserl, however, is misguided, for in the end, his phenomenology seeks to be a rigorous eidetic science, in which the individual has no place. "For phenomenology, the singular is eternally the apeiron". (Edmund Husserl, "Philosophy as Rigorous Science", p. 116)

What all of this suggests is that the notion of pre-predicative experience is rather dubious.

52-I have not considered a possible foundationalist reply to Merleau-Ponty's criticisms because I believe that he has conclusively shown that it is untenable. He himself also considered intellectualism to be superior to sensationalism. See the following:

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. 208

53-For discussion of this difficulty, see the following:

Edward G. Ballard, "On Cognition of the Pre-Cognitive", in The Philosophical Quarterly, Vol. 11, No. 44, July 1961, pp. 238-239, 242-244

John F. Bannan, The Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., New York, 1967, pp. 147-149

Raymond Herbenick, "Merleau-Ponty and the Primacy of Reflection", in Garth Gillan (ed.), The Horizons of the Flesh, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, 1973, p. 93

Herbert Spiegelberg, The Phenomenological Movement-Vol. 2 (second edition), Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1976, p. 560

William J. Hurst, "Merleau-Ponty's Concept of the Self", in International Philosophical Quarterly, Vol. xxii, No. 4, Dec. 1982, p. 93

54-Edward G. Ballard, "On Cognition of the Pre-Cognitive", pp. 238-239

55-Michael Kullman and Charles Taylor, "The Pre-Objective World", in The Review of Metaphysics, Vol. xii, No. 1, Sept. 1958, p. 113

For an analogous critique of Husserl, see the following:

Ross Harrison, "The Concept of Prepredicative Experience", in Edo Pivčević (ed.), Phenomenology and Philosophical Understanding, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1975

56-Remy C. Kwant, The Phenomenological Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh, Pa., 1963, pp. 226-227

57-Ibid., p. 227

58-Henry Pietersma, "Merleau-Ponty and the Problem of Knowledge", in Donn Welton and Hugh J. Silverman (eds.), Critical and Dialectical Phenomenology, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1987, p. 187

59-Ibid.

60-Ibid.

61-Edward G. Ballard, "On Cognition of the Pre-Cognitive", p. 240

62-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Primacy of Perception and Its Philosophical Consequences", p. 30

63-Ibid., p. 28

64-Ibid.

65-Ibid., p. 29

66-Ibid., p. 34

67-Ibid., p. 18

68-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Structure of Behavior, p. 224

69-The article Dreyfus and Todes are replying to is that by Michael Kullman and Charles Taylor, which was previously referred to. See note number 54, of this chapter.

70-H.L. Dreyfus and S.J. Todes, "The Three Worlds of Merleau-Ponty", in Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, Vol. xxii, No. 4, June 1962, pp. 559-565

I should note that what I charge Dreyfus and Todes with ignoring was not the direct concern of their essay. What is difficult to accept, however, is the absence of any discussion of this issue, given what they are arguing for, and the essay they are replying to.

71-Albert Rabil, Jr., Merleau-Ponty: Existentialist of the Social World, Columbia University Press, New York, 1967, pp. 188-189

72-Ibid., p. 189

73-Ronald Bruzina, Logos and Eidos, Mouton and Co. N.V., Publishers, The Hague, 1970, p. 97

74-Laurie Spurling, Phenomenology and the Social World, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1977, p. 34

75-Ibid., pp. 143-149

76-Ibid., p. 157

77-Samuel B. Mallin, Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1979, pp. 167-168

78-Don Ihde, "Singing the World: Language and Perception", in Garth Gillan (ed.), The Horizons of the Flesh
William J. Hurst, "Merleau-Ponty's Concept of the Self", pp. 234-236

79-Joseph Rouse, "Merleau-Ponty and the Existential Conception of Science", in Synthese, Vol. 66, No. 2, Feb. 1986, p. 262

80-Ibid., pp. 259-261

81-Thomas N. Munson, S.J., "The Pre-Objective Reconsidered", in The Review of Metaphysics, Vol. xii, No. 4, June 1959, p. 632

Chapter Three: The Indeterminate Foundations of Knowledge

1-John Wild, Existence and the World of Freedom, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1963, p. 88

- 2-Ernest H. Hutten, The Origins of Science, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1962, p. 109
- 3-G.W.F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, p. 1, sec. 1
- 4-Carl G. Hempel, Philosophy of Natural Science, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1966, p. 1
- 5-Ibid., p. 48
- 6-Ibid., p. 14
- 7-Ibid., p. 72
- 8-Ibid., pp. 17, 30
- 9-Michael Oakeshott, Experience And Its Modes, p. 170
- 10-Ibid., p. 171
- 11-Edmund Husserl, The Crises of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology, pp. 121, 126
- 12-Brand Blanshard, The Nature of Thought-Vol. 1, p. 631
- 13-Michael J. Loux, "Particulars and Their Individuation", in Michael J. Loux (ed.), Universals and Particulars: Readings in Ontology, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 1976, p. 236
- 14-Ibid., p. 238
- 15-Ibid., p. 239
- 16-Brand Blanshard, The Nature of Thought-Vol. 1, p. 625
- 17-Such an attempt can be found in the following essay, which is indebted to the thought of Gustav Bergman:
Edwin B. Allaire, "Bare Particulars", in Michael J. Loux (ed.), Universals and Particulars: Readings in Ontology
- 18-Ibid., p. 287
- 19-Ibid.
- 20-Ibid.
- 21-Edwin B. Allaire, "Another Look At Bare Particulars", in Michael J. Loux (ed.), Universals and Particulars: Readings in Ontology, p. 303
- 22-Ibid.
- 23-Carl G. Hempel, Philosophy of Natural Science, pp. 54-56
- 24-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. 323
- 25-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Themes from the Lectures at the Collège de France 1952-1960, (trans. John O'Neill), Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1970, p. 4

- 26-Edmund Husserl, Experience and Judgment, p. 36
- 27-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "An Unpublished Text by Maurice Merleau-Ponty: A Prospectus of His Work", pp. 5-6
- 28-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. xix
- 29-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Primacy of Perception and Its Philosophical Consequences", p. 12
An interesting attempt to go beyond the opposition of bare particulars and universals, which has some similarities to Merleau-Ponty's thought, can be seen in the following:
Douglas C. Long, "Particulars and their Qualities", in Michael J. Loux (ed.), Universals and Particulars: Readings in Ontology
- 30-Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, p. 93, A51, B75
- 31-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. 394
- 32-Ibid.
- 33-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Philosopher and His Shadow", p. 173
- 34-Saul A. Kripke, Naming and Necessity, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1980, p. 96
- 35-Ibid.
- 36-Ibid., p. 107
- 37-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. 178
- 38-Ibid., p. 190
- 39-Ibid., p. 186
- 40-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Primacy of Perception and Its Philosophical Consequences", p. 19
- 41-Ibid., p. 30
- 42-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. xx
- 43-Ibid., p. 61
- 44-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Primacy of Perception and Its Philosophical Consequences", p. 30
- 45-Ibid., p. 34
- 46-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. 71
- 47-Edmund Husserl, The Crises of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology, p. 51
- 48-Moritz Schlick, "Facts and Propositions", in Oswald Hanfling (ed.), Essential Readings in Logical Positivism, p. 200

- 49-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Philosopher and Sociology", p. 101
- 50-Ibid., pp. 101-102
- 51-Ibid., p. 102
- 52-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Primacy of Perception and Its Philosophical Consequences", p. 29
- 53-Ibid.
- 54-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Philosopher and Sociology", p. 102
- 55-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Phenomenology and the Sciences of Man", (trans. John Wild), in The Primacy of Perception, p. 94
- 56- Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Structure of Behavior, p. 186
- 57-Ibid.
Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. pp. 323-324
- 58-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Structure of Behavior, pp. 212-213
Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. 233
- 59-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. 62
- 60-Ibid., p. 38
- 61-Ibid., pp. 68, 329
- 62-Ibid., p. 169
- 63-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Primacy of Perception and Its Philosophical Consequences", pp. 14-15
- 64-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. 274
- 65-Ibid., p. 319
- 66-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Primacy of Perception and Its Philosophical Consequences", p. 16
For a helpful discussion of Merleau-Ponty's concept of style, see the following:
Linda Singer, "Merleau-Ponty On the Concept of Style", in Man and World, Vol. 14, No. 2, 1981, pp. 153-163
- 67-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. 68
- 68-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Primacy of Perception and Its Philosophical Consequences", p. 16
- 69-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. 331
- 70-Ibid., p. 91
- 71-Ibid., p. 100
- 72-Ibid., p. 132

- 73-Ibid., p. xvi
- 74-Ibid., p. 387
- 75-Ibid., p. 326
- 76-Ibid., p. 219
- 77-Ibid., p. 418
- 78-Ibid., p. 240
- 79-Ibid., p. 393
- 80-Ibid., p. 427
- 81-Ibid., p. 241

Chapter Four: A "Theory" of Epistemic Evaluation

- 1-Edmund Husserl, Ideas, p. 100, sec. 32
- 2-Ibid., p. 94, sec. 28
- 3-Edmund Husserl, Logical Investigations-Vol. 1, p. 263
Edmund Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, pp. 6, 35
- 4-Edmund Husserl, Logical Investigations-Vol. 1, p. 263
- 5-Edmund Husserl, Ideas, p. 353, sec. 137
- 6-Edmund Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, p. 15
- 7-Edmund Husserl, "Husserl's Inaugural Lecture at Freiburg im Breisgau (1917),
(trans. Robert Welsh Jordan), in Peter McCormick and Frederick A. Elliston (eds.),
Husserl: Shorter Works, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 1981,
pp. 14-15
- 8-Edmund Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, p. 77
- 9-Ibid.
- 10-Ibid., p. 78
- 11-Ibid.
- 12-Ibid., p. 79
- 13-Edmund Husserl, Experience and Judgment, pp. 31-32, 42-45
- 14-Ibid., pp. 54-58
- 15-Edmund Husserl, The Crises of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology,
pp. 120, 155, 174

16-Edmund Husserl, Experience and Judgment, pp. 45-46

17- A similar difficulty may also possibly be found in Merleau-Ponty's own writings, in trying to understand pre-objective experience. Throughout this essay, I have been characterizing pre-objective experience as our common everyday experience of such things as tables, chairs, lamps, trees, stones, other animals, persons, and so on. But at various points in the Phenomenology of Perception, Merleau-Ponty claims that common sense suffers from the same objectivistic understanding as science, (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, pp. xi, 71) and that the study of consciousness and its experiences carries us beyond common sense postulates. (Ibid., p. 59) The everyday world is analogous to Husserl's natural attitude, which is permeated by objective meanings. The return to pre-objective experience would thus be a return to an experience which underlies both it and the world of scientific knowledge. Again, following Husserl, this foundational experience is one of a natural world which precedes and grounds all cultural meanings. (Ibid., pp. 24, 146, 198, 293, 324, 346, 347, 450) "The natural world is the horizon of all horizons, the style of all possible styles, which guarantees for my experiences a given, not a willed, unity underlying all the disruptions of my personal and historical life". (Ibid., p. 330)

This dimension of Merleau-Ponty's thought has been greatly emphasized by Samuel Mallin, in his work on Merleau-Ponty. He argues that perception is a transcendental structure which serves as the condition for the possibility of any experience or existent. (Samuel B. Mallin, Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy, p. 54) As transcendental, it is universal and necessary to all persons. (Ibid.) That is, it is both trans-historical and trans-cultural, and provides all individuals with a basic, common world, (Ibid., pp. 78-79) which grounds all the other basic regions of existence: motility, sociality, cognition. (Ibid., p. 50)

The difficulty with this conception of pre-objective experience is the same as that in Husserl's account of the experience of the life-world, viz., how can we gain access to a culturally neutral, pre-historical experience, given our historical situatedness, which both philosophers recognize? Our own interpretation goes against this type of analysis, and if it is the case that this is how Merleau-Ponty understands pre-objective experience, then we must reject the latter.

But there are opposing tendencies in Merleau-Ponty's thought, as we have already seen, especially in the notion of the Fundierung relation. Pre-objective experience depends on predicative judgments for its being, though not directly on explicit judgments. Merleau-Ponty himself says, as we saw, that there is no pure and unexpressed life in man, i.e., all experience is mediated by present and past judging activity, with the latter forming a part of the horizon of experience. Recall that our linguistic expressions, once articulated, take on an independence from the speaker, and become sedimented into our surrounding world. (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. 392) "We live in a world where speech is an institution", (Ibid., p. 184) i.e., in a linguistically mediated world, and "it is within a world already spoken and speaking that we think". (Ibid.) To be able to apprehend a world which precedes language, and hence thought, contradicts the Fundierung relation.

Merleau-Ponty, in commenting upon the objection that his philosophy relativizes the world to human existence, and that on the contrary the world preceded man, says that the descriptions of such a world, by means of which it is known, themselves presuppose our pre-objective experience, with all of its cultural and historical meanings. (Ibid., p. 432) As Merleau-Ponty expresses it, "consciousness always finds itself already at work in the world". (Ibid.) He also says, in a claim foreshadowing

a famous statement made by Michel Foucault, the following: "Man is a historical idea and not a natural species". (Ibid., p. 170)

The comment on talk of a pre-human world is revealing. Though we can speak about nature, and we do, how we understand it is historically conditioned. I suggest that this way of speaking of nature is consistent with our interpretation of pre-objective experience. Mallin himself admits that the natural world is an abstraction if taken independently from the three other basic structures he identifies. (Samuel Mallin, Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology, p. 50) But once this is admitted, then one cannot affirm that the meaning of the natural world and our cognition of it is divorced from these other structures.

I cannot fully delve into this issue without entering the dark and narrow corridors of textual exegesis. At best, I wish to bring to attention this possible conflict between my understanding of pre-objective experience and Merleau-Ponty's, and point out that my interpretation is not without justification.

18-David Carr, Phenomenology and the Problem of History, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1974, p. 219

19-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. xiv

20-Ibid.

21-Ibid., p. vii

22-Ibid., p. 294

23-Ibid.

24-Ibid., p. 342

25-Ibid., p. 297

26-My example is a modification of one of Merleau-Ponty's own examples.
See the following:
Ibid., pp. 296-297

27-Ibid., p. 297

28-Ibid.

29-Ibid., p. 119

30-Ibid., p. 297

31-Ibid., p. 321

32-Ibid., p. 344

33-Ibid., p. 360

34-Ibid., p. 342

35-G.W.F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, p. 27, sec. 47

36-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. 313

- 37-Ibid.
- 38-Ibid., p. 71
- 39-Ibid., p. 206
- 40-Ibid., p. 395
- 41-Ibid., pp. 139-140
- 42-Ibid., p. 143
- 43-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Metaphysical In Man", p. 94, footnote number 13
- 44-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Primacy of Perception and Its Philosophical Consequences", p. 14
- 45-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. 129
- 46-Ibid., p. xvi
- 47-Ibid., p. 207
- 48-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Primacy of Perception and Its Philosophical Consequences", p. 13
- 49-Ibid., p. 20
- 50-Ibid.
- 51-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "On the Phenomenology of Language", in Signs, p. 96
- 52-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. 383
- 53-Ibid., p. 395
- 54-Ibid., p. 396
- 55-Ibid.
- 56-Ibid., p. 398
- 57-Ibid., pp. 169, 410
- 58-Ibid., p. 170
- 59- Samuel Mallin's commentary is the work which has dedicated the most attention to examining Merleau-Ponty's understanding of Cognition. Mallin argues that Merleau-Ponty defines truth as correspondence; the correspondence between a belief and the pre-objective experience it purports to express. (Samuel B. Mallin, Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy, p. 221) What we have provided is not a definition of truth, but a criterion of epistemic justification. This, however, has implications for how truth is defined. To attribute a correspondence theory to Merleau-Ponty implies that explicit judgments and pre-objective experience are two independent "realms of being", so to speak. But the Fundierung relation indicates that this cannot be the case (though this is consistent with Mallin's own interpretation . . .

of the relation between pre-objective experience and cognition). (See: Ibid., pp. 231-232, and note number 17 of chapter four) Mallin himself notes that correspondence, for Merleau-Ponty, is not an external relation. (Ibid., p. 222) Yet if it is not, it is difficult to see how one is to conceive the relation of correspondence. What precisely are the two relata of this relationship? They cannot be a belief and the experience it is about, because the latter implies a horizon intrinsic to its meaning which cannot be exhausted by a belief. That is, if truth were defined as correspondence, it would have to be between a belief and the whole horizontality of an experience, which is impossible. For a belief to be accepted, it must be compatible with that horizon, which Mallin acknowledges. (Ibid.) But to speak in terms of compatibility with a horizon, is to speak of coherence. Mallin rejects coherence here because, in part (again following his interpretation of the relation of pre-objective experience to objective knowledge), he maintains that the horizon of a belief is a set of background beliefs, and not perception as such. (Ibid., p. 223) Hence even though one may accept coherence as a criterion of knowledge, it is not the definition of truth. Correspondence establishes the connection between beliefs and the empirical world. But we have seen that these two claims are both false and unnecessary, because the horizon of our experience and of our beliefs about experience, is one and the same, viz., pre-objective experience. Mallin, though, equally rejects coherence as a criterion of knowledge, because it demands of the cognitive agent that he or she have a grasp of the background of coherent beliefs, so as to evaluate a particular belief. But as Mallin points out, this kind of apprehension is not possible. (Ibid., pp. 219-220) This raises the issue of the meta-justification of our beliefs, that was previously mentioned, and which will be dealt with in section six of the fourth chapter.

60-That of Laurence Bonjour, as found in the following:

Laurence Bonjour, The Structure of Empirical Knowledge, pp. 101-106

61-Ibid., p. 101

62-Ibid., p. 102

63-Ibid.

64-Ibid., p. 103

65-Ibid., pp. 104-105

66-Edmund Husserl, The Crises of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology, p. 142

67-See the following:

F.H. Bradley, Essays On Truth and Reality, p. 110

Michael Oakeshott, Experience And Its Modes, p. 47

Brand Blanshard, The Nature of Thought-Vol. 2, pp. 261, 268

68-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. 40

69-Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, "Critical Remarks Concerning The General Part Of Descartes' Principles", in Monadology and Other Philosophical Essays, (trans. Paul Schrecker and Anne Martin Schrecker), The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., Indianapolis, 1965, p. 24, sec. 1

70-Ibid., p. 22, sec. 1

71-Ibid.

72-Ibid., p. 23, sec. 1

73-David Hume, An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis, 1977, p. 109

74-Henry Pietersma, "Merleau-Ponty and the Problem of Knowledge", pp. 189-198

75-David Hume, An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, p. 111

Chapter Five: The Limits of Epistemic Reason

1-Roderick M. Chisholm, Theory of Knowledge, pp. 123-134

2-For a more detailed discussion of Chisholm's position, to which my own is indebted, see the following:

Jonathan Dancy, An Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology, pp. 230-233

3-G.W.F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, p. 52, sec. 82

4-Ibid., p. 53, sec. 82

5-Ibid., p. 53, sec. 83

6-Ibid., p. 53, sec. 84

7-Ibid., p. 54, sec. 85

8-Ibid., pp. 54-55, sec. 85

9-Ibid., pp. 56-57, sec. 89

10-Ibid., p. 21, sec. 36

11-G.W.F. Hegel, Logic, p. 259, sec. 193

12-Ibid., p. 41, sec. 24

13-G.W.F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, p. 14, sec. 26

14-Ibid., p. 22, sec. 37

15-G.W.F. Hegel, Logic, p. 49, sec. 28

16-Ibid., p. 261, sec. 194

17-For a far more complete comparison of the philosophies of Hegel and Husserl, see the following:

Quentin Lauer, "Phenomenology: Hegel and Husserl", in Essays In Hegelian Dialectic, Fordham University Press, New York, 1977

- 18-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. 409
- 19-Jean-Paul Sartre, "Merleau-Ponty", in Situations, (trans. Benita Eisler), George Braziller, Inc., New York, 1965, p. 237
- 20-See for instance, the following:
Thomas Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (second edition), The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1970, pp. 5, 24, 113, 128
Hilary Putnam, Reason, Truth And History, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981, p. 52
- 21-Donald Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme", in Inquiries Into Truth and Interpretation, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1985, p. 189
The following quotation from Putnam shows clearly the same tension that we saw in coherentism's analysis of experience.
"Internalism does not deny that there are experiential inputs to knowledge; knowledge is not a story with no constraints except internal coherence; but it does deny that there are any inputs which are not themselves to some extent shaped by our concepts, by the vocabulary we use to report and describe them, or any inputs which admit of only one description, independent of all conceptual choices. Even our description of our own sensations, so dear as a starting point for knowledge to generations of epistemologists, is heavily affected (as are the sensations themselves, for that matter) by a host of conceptual choices. The very inputs upon which our knowledge is based are conceptually contaminated; but contaminated inputs are better than none."
Hilary Putnam, Reason, Truth And History, p. 54
- 22-Richard Rorty has argued that because we are always in touch with the world, then concerns with epistemic justification are otiose. See the following:
Richard Rorty, "The World Well Lost", in Consequences of Pragmatism, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1982, p. 13
- 23-Jurgen Habermas, Knowledge and Human Interests, p. 9
- 24-See the following, as examples:
G.W.F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, p. 50, sec. 78
F.H. Bradley, Essays On Truth and Reality, p. 213
Otto Neurath, "Protocol Sentences", pp. 167-168
Nicholas Rescher, The Coherence theory of Truth, Oxford At The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1973, pp. 332-333
- 25-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. xxi
- 26-Ibid.
- 27-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Sense and Non-Sense, p. 3
- 28-For an interesting attempt at drawing some of the implications of the contingent ground of normative evaluation for ethics, see the following:
Osborne P. Wiggins, "Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenological Ethics", in Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal, 1985, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 43-56

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